

THIRTEEN
SERMONS
ON THE
PARABLE
OF THE
TEN VIRGINS.

With THREE OTHERS on
Personal and Family-Religion.

PREACHED AT
WAREHAM in DORSETSHIRE.

By S. READER.

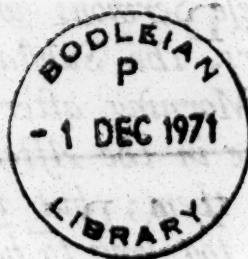
LONDON:
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M.DCC.LXV.

TO
The Dissenting Congregation
at Warrington

I thought I ought to say, and others of
my friends, that I have received the Re-
quest of several members, who have to
the thought of a sermon. The thought has
been on the Lord's Day, July 25, 1702.
I thought to myself, I have not done so
withstanding the Request of my friends - as
rendered it scarce possible, as I thought, that my
other friends, who are not of the same
ply with your Duty, are more especially, as
the simplicity of the subject, rendered it easier.
Attention, therefore, that I am not negligent,
which probably would have been still greater,
had not your Request been already too long
deferred.

As some of the members of the
congregations, and others, have been
Discourse in the
and of a long
some frequency in
should be thought
they may perhaps think

I intended at first to have added only two Ser-
mons on P. 1. and P. 2. Religion, accord-
ing to the Request of the Friends of my
Fellowship.



T O

*The Dissenting Congregation
at Wareham.*

*A*T length I present to you, and others of my Friends, those Sermons, which the Request of several among you, gave Rise to the Thought of publishing. The dreadful Fire here on the Lord's Day, July 25, 1762. brought so many Engagements upon me, notwithstanding the Preservation of my House, as rendered it scarce possible, in Consistence with my other stated and occasional Employments, to comply with your Desire any sooner; especially, as the Similarity of the Subjects rendered greater Alterations necessary, than I at first imagined, which probably would have been still greater, had not your Expectations been already too long deferred.

As some of these Sermons were single Discourses, and others, the Substance of a short Discourse in the Morning after an Exposition, and of a longer one in the Afternoon, there is some Inequality in them; but if any of them should be thought too long to be read at once, they may be easily divided.

I intended at first to have added only two Sermons on Personal and Family-Religion, according to the Advertisement at the End of my

Thanksgiving Sermon for the Peace; But as the first of them was very long, when delivered from the Pulpit, and yet several things were but just mentioned, which seemed to demand a more particular Attention, I chose to give larger Scope to a Subject, which is of so much Importance to the real Welfare of Families, and to the Support of Religion in the World, and have therefore divided that Sermon into two.

As I must ever esteem it one of the most merciful Providences of my Life, that directed my Settlement among you at first, and has continued it near twenty-six Years; so I thankfully acknowledge the great Marks of Friendship, I have received from you, for so long a Time: And as I would not be wanting in any Instances of grateful and affectionate Returns, so it would give me the highest Pleasure, to be an Instrument in the Hand of God, of spiritual and eternal Benefit to you and your Families. This is the Object I desire to keep in constant View, in all my publick Ministrations and private Conversation among you; and to this I have endeavoured to attend in the Discourses now before you. The terrible Dispensation of Providence, with which God has most justly chastised us, since they were offered from the Pulpit, may be reasonably expected to add Weight, among you, at least, to the Admonitions they contain, to give all Diligence, to be prepared for a Scene unspeakably more tremendous, of which that may be considered as an Emblem.

We

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We were not indeed, according to a Case supposed in these Sermons, roused from our Sleep with the Alarm of Fire in the Night; and it was a Mercy for which we cannot be sufficiently thankful, that we were not; since if we had, the rapid Progress of the Flames, through the Dryness of the Season, and the Number of thatched Houses, and other Buildings, must probably have occasioned the Loss of many Lives. We were surpris'd, you know, in the midst of the Worship of the Afternoon, and in five or six Hours had the Grief to see near 150 Houses consumed, and so many Families reduced to great Distress; but, through the Forbearance of God, not one Life lost.

Destitute of Habitations; driven to a cold Lodging in the open Air; and almost without Food for yourselves and your Children, till the Charity of neighbouring Towns and Gentlemen supplied it; turned out of your Employments, and crowded together in the most inconvenient manner, for a considerable Time afterwards, your Case was truly pitiable. And it must be ever acknowledged, with the utmost Gratitude to God, and our Fellow-Subjects in different Parts of the Kingdom, it did indeed meet with much Pity: And we in particular, as Protestant Dissenters, are especially indebted to the Liberality, not only of many of the same Profession with ourselves, but of some worthy Persons of different Persuasions, who with an amiable Candour, contributed to enable us soon to
rebuild

rebuild our Place of Worship, that was consumed in that dreadful Day. Let us not forget the lasting Obligation, under which the great Kindness, that has been shewn us in both respects, lays us, earnestly to pray, that the Blessings both of Time and Eternity, may descend upon our several Benefactors.

It has been sometimes very naturally and reasonably asked, by Persons inquiring concerning our general Calamity, Whether the People were the better for it? Would to God that the Question was capable of a more happy Answer, and that it could be replied, That Sin was evidently less prevalent; that divine Ordinances were attended with greater Diligence; that there was Reason to believe, that Family-Worship was set up in all the Houses, both that were preserved, and that have been rebuilt, and Religion in every respect better minded. But, however it may be, in some particular Instances, is there not Reason to fear, concerning the greater Part, that they are just the same as they were before, if not, concerning some, that they are even worse? How great is the Guilt and Shame, wherever it is so! And how dreadful the Account shortly to be given, before the Judge of Quick and Dead, where it must be examined, what Improvement has been made, both of Afflictions and Mercies!

God is in Effect, saying, to others concerning us, as he did concerning Shiloh, Jer. vii. 12. But go ye now unto my Place which was in Shiloh, where I set my Name at the first, and see what I

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did to it, for the Wickedness of my People Israel. *And God grant that the Inhabitants of other Places, may take the Warning, and dread the Language of Prophaneness, the Falshood and Injustice, the Intemperance, Sabbath-breaking, Neglect of publick Ordinances, of Family-Religion, and of the pious Education of their Children, so generally prevailing, and so directly tending, to bring down like Judgments to that which we have suffered, or others not less terrible, And may other worshipping Assemblies learn to fear, that disregard of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, and that Carelessness and Formality in Worship, which threatens the Removal of their Candlestick out of its Place*, or, which would be equally dreadful, the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from them.*

But how peculiarly inexcusable shall we be, if we ourselves take not the Warning! What else can we expect, if we slight it, but either some more awful Judgments in the present Time, or the eternal Weight of divine Displeasure in the World to come! May these Discourses be the Means of preventing both, and be rendered effectual by a divine Blessing attending them, for detecting the destructive Mistakes of self-deceiving Sinners, awakening the secure, reclaiming Backsliders, quickening the Slothful, and exciting the People of God to the utmost Activity in his Service: And I earnestly entreat the Prayers

* Rev. ii. 5.

both

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both of those that fear God among you, and of others, into whose Hands they may fall, that are concerned for the Salvation of immortal Souls, that this may be the happy Effect, which would afford a Satisfaction to be relished in Death itself, by

Your affectionate Servant in the Gospel,

Wareham,
Sept. 12, 1764.

SIMON READER.

S E R-

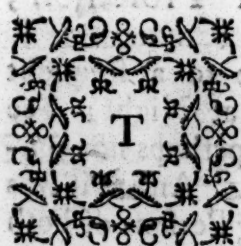


S E R M O N I.

CHRIST described as a Bridegroom,
AND
The Professors of Religion as Virgins
attending him.

M A T T H. XXV. I.

*Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened
unto ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and
went forth to meet the Bridegroom.*

 H E S E Words are the Introduction to one of the most solemn Parables of our Lord; which a Soul, thoroughly concerned for its everlasting Salvation, can perhaps seldom attend to, without new Impressions of holy Fear and Jealousy of itself, lest it should at last be numbered among the foolish Virgins, and as such be excluded from the everlasting Joy and Blessedness prepared for the Wise: And would to God that every one that bears the Christian Name, would attend to this
B awakening

awakening Representation with such a Disposition, and such Dread of a Mistake, as Matters of everlasting Importance require.

OUR Lord here compares the Kingdom of Heaven to ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom: Five of whom were wise and five foolish. The wise Virgins not only took their Lamps, but took Oil in their Vessels with them, to serve for a fresh Supply; but the foolish Virgins made no such Provision; in consequence of which, when the Bridegroom came, their Lamps were gone out; and while they in vain sought a Supply, they were excluded from the Marriage by this foolish Neglect*. The evident Intention of the Lord *Jesus* in this Parable, is to represent to us the immense Difference there will at last be found, betwixt mere outward Professors of Religion, and those that have an inward Principle of Grace, to support their Profession;

* This Parable has a plain Reference to a frequent Eastern Custom, to celebrate Marriages at Night; See *Gen.* xxix. 23. *Luke* xxii. 35—38. though perhaps not constantly observed: See *Ruth* iv. *Matt.* xxii. 4. And as it was then, as well as since, usual for other young Persons of both Sexes to attend upon such Occasions, See *Judg.* xiv. 10. *Psal.* xlv. 14. and as Light would be often necessary for the Accommodation of the Bridegroom, Bride, and their Friends; if any that had either been desired, or had voluntarily undertaken, to furnish themselves with Lamps for that Purpose, were so thoughtless as not to provide a sufficient Quantity of Oil, to burn as long as there should be Occasion; it would be natural to expect that the Bridegroom should so far resent the Affront, as to exclude them from the Marriage-Supper.

when

when the former, notwithstanding their Profession, shall be for ever excluded from the Glory of God's eternal Kingdom, to which the latter shall have a most joyful Admission.

AT present I confine myself to this introductory part of the Parable, *Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened to ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom*; Words which plainly refer to what our Lord had been speaking immediately before, in the Close of the foregoing Chapter, concerning his coming to reward his faithful and diligent Servants, and to punish the unfaithful and disobedient: Then it shall appear, how properly the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to ten Virgins, so different in their Character and Conduct, and treated in so different a manner as this Parable represents.

By the Kingdom of Heaven, we are plainly to understand the Church of Christ, and his Government in it; his visible Church, consisting both of those that are, and of those that are not sincere, and distinguished from the Invisible, which consists only of sincere Members: The Government of Christ in it is begun on Earth, but shall be displayed in greater Glory at the Day of Judgment, when He shall make an eternal Separation betwixt sincere and hypocritical Professors of Religion. Our Lord here unites the Idea of the Kingdom of Heaven with that of a Marriage; for it is indeed a Kingdom of Love, and productive of abun-

4 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

dant Blessedness, to all its genuine Subjects, who are all united to Christ by strict and everlasting Bonds.

In these Words we may observe,

I. The Character and Coming of Christ as a Bridegroom. And,

II. A Description of the Professors of Religion in general, as Virgins taking their Lamps, and going forth to meet Him.

We may observe, I. The Character and Coming of Christ as a Bridegroom.

Christ is the great Object of Regard in the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Church of God both on Earth and in Heaven; the Object which all Professors of Religion profess to regard, and which all sincere Christians do indeed revere and love; with whom we have the greatest Concern, and to whom we owe entire Subjection and Obedience: And all the Inhabitants of Heaven admire, adore, and delight in Him for ever. The View here given, of the Character and Coming of Christ as a Bridegroom, may suggest to us such Thoughts as these: He comes now to espouse Souls to himself by the Gospel—he comes hereafter to perfect their Union to himself—And he comes then with the Splendour—the Tenderness—and the Pleasure of a Bridegroom.

I. The

1. The Lord *Jefus Chrift* comes now, to espouse Souls to himself by the Gospel.

The Union betwixt Chrift and his Church in general, as well as particular Souls, is often represented in the Word of God by a Nuptial Union ; particularly in the *xlvth Psalm*, and in *Solomon's Song* : And the Apostle uses the same Metaphor, *2 Cor. xi. 2. For I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste Virgin to Chrift.* This is the great End of the Gospel, to espouse Souls to Chrift ; 'tis the Object which faithful Ministers desire to keep in View in all their Ministrations of it : And I beseech you to attend to it in this View, as it does not answer its grand Design to your Souls, if this is not the Effect of it.

Chrift comes in the Gospel, and by his Servants, to persuade you to give him your Hearts ; to yield him the chief Place in your Affections, and to devote yourselves, and your All to him ; to be wholly for him, and not for another ; to love him as your kindest Friend, and noblest Portion ; to obey, and honour, and serve him as your rightful Lord, to whom you are under the greatest Obligations, and on whom you have an absolute and constant Dependence. And is it not your most reasonable Service that you should do so ? Conscience cannot but join with Chrift and his Messengers, to urge it, as that to which you are strongly bound, and which is indispensably necessary to your present and everlasting Happiness.

6 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

Christ comes by the Gospel, to take immortal Souls into the nearest, the most endeared, and most durable Relation to himself; a Relation which shall survive the Ruins of Mortality, and universal Nature, and make you unutterably happy, for Time, and to the utmost Ages of Eternity. Every one that truly receives the Lord *Jesus Christ*, shall with him receive the highest and everlasting Benefits. To persuade you to this therefore, the Word of God is given; Sabbaths and publick Ordinances are continued; and for this Purpose Ministers beseech you, both in publick and in private, to devote yourselves to the Service and Honour of the blessed Redeemer.

2. The Lord *Jesus Christ* comes hereafter, to perfect the Union of his People to himself.

In the present State, there are many deplorable Hindrances to the Perfection of their Union to Christ: There is yet much Sin left in them, much remaining Alienation of Heart from him, much Coldness of Affection to him, much Instability in the Temper of their Minds, and many Departures from him; their Enjoyment of Christ is very imperfect, and soon interrupted, and the happy Seasons of it too commonly few: The World takes up much of the Thoughts and Time of those who indeed love him, and have surrendered themselves to him, and draws off their Attention and Affection from the blessed Redeemer: Indwelling Sin does them unspeakable Injury, often seduces

duces them from following Christ, or damps their Ardour in seeking him; and *Satan* uses a thousand Artifices to keep them at a Distance from him, and lead them into those Things, which must grieve the Spirit of Christ, and provoke him to withdraw from them: Our Fellow-Creatures frequently become grievous Snares and Temptations to us; sometimes by their Reproaches and Injuries, sometimes by their Passions, sometimes by their Inticements, sometimes by their Example, and in a great Variety of Ways, not easy to be recounted: And the various Events of Time, in a manner unobserved and unthought of, draw off the Soul from Christ, and hinder its delightful Intercourse with him.

But the Lord *Jesus Christ* comes hereafter, to perfect the Union of his Servants to him, and to take them to his immediate Presence, to behold his Face with unutterable and eternal Joy. He comes to receive them to the fullest Enjoyment of himself, to perfect an everlasting Fellowship with him, and to the Participation of that Glory which he himself possesses. He has declared, *Rev. iii. 21. To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his Throne.* All the Hindrances of a Believer's closer Union to Christ shall then be removed; indwelling Sin, cold and dead Affections to the blessed Redeemer, and a Heart ever prone to wander from him, shall then

8 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

have no more place in his Servants : They shall forget him no more, and complain, and be chargeable no more, with an evil Heart of Unbelief, in departing from the living God : There shall be no more Provocations offered him, to hide his Face, and no more Complaints that he does : They shall take their everlasting Leave of the World and all its Snares, of all the Wickedness and Injuries of Sinners, and all the Imperfections of the Saints : Satan cannot enter that World to which Christ conducts his Servants, nor any more disturb their Purity and their Peace. They shall have nothing to allay the Delight of their everlasting Love, and Duty, and Praise to the blessed Redeemer, and everlasting Enjoyment of him. This blessed State shall commence at Death, but shall be yet more compleat, yet more consummately glorious at the Resurrection ; when the Lord Jesus Christ * *shall appear the second time without Sin, unto Salvation to them that look for him.*

3. The Lord Jesus comes at last, with the Splendour of a Bridegroom.

At present, his Excellencies and Glories are displayed in the Gospel. He is represented as † *the Rose of Sharon, and the Lilly of the Vallies* ; as ‡ *the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely* : He is proclaimed as || *the*

* Heb. ix. 28.
|| Jer. xxiii. 6.

† Cant. ii. 1.

‡ Cant. v. 16.

Lord his People's Righteousness; as the Way of their Access to God, their great Sacrifice for Sin, their * *Advocate with the Father*, the Fountain of their Strength and Comfort, and † *the Author of eternal Salvation to all them that obey him*. The Representations that are given of him in the Gospel, abundantly answer the Character of a most glorious Bridegroom.

But at his second Coming he will appear as such indeed, and every Eye shall see his Glory; his Saints with unutterable Love and Delight, and his Enemies with Terror and Anguish too great to be described. He will appear with the Glory of a Royal Bridegroom, according to the Representation *Matt. xxii. 2. The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain King, which made a Marriage for his Son*. He is the ‡ *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*; the Sovereign of Heaven and Earth; the Lord of Men, and Angels, and universal Nature; and as such will he appear at his second Coming, arrayed in Robes of Light, and crowned with immortal Glory. He shall come with a Royal and more than a Royal Attendance, with an Attendance truly Divine: all the Angels of God waiting upon him, and the § *Spirits of just Men made perfect*, coming to resume their Bodies that have long slumbered in the Dust, shall constitute

* John ii. 1.

† Heb. v. 9.

‡ Rev. xix. 16.

§ Heb. xii. 23.

10 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

his glorious Train. He shall come with all the Honours of Heaven, and with all its Hosts paying him their joyful Homage. Thus we read *Luke ix. 26. He shall come in his own Glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels. Then the Moon shall be confounded, and the Sun ashamed,* to refer to *Isaiah xx. 3. when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his An- tients gloriously.* All Nature, with all its numerous Inhabitants, shall acknowledge its Lord, and rejoice or tremble before him. Then shall his Servants see, with unutterable Triumph, what a Saviour they have loved, trusted in, and devoted themselves to; and how little Reason there was to be ashamed of him and of his Cause; what Ingratitude and Folly it was, so long to withstand his Calls; what an inestimable Blessing was conferred upon them, when they were led by the Influence of his Spirit to accept and embrace him; and how unworthy their Temper and Conduct afterwards was, to love, honour, serve, and delight in him so little. Then shall Sinners see what amazing Loss they have incurred, in missing of an Interest in such a Saviour, by their Love and Choice of Sin; and what dreadful Ruin they have brought upon themselves, in making so glorious a Sovereign their Enemy, who was once ready to become their Portion and their Friend. God grant that this may not
be

be the Case of one Soul among us, at the great Day of the Appearance of Christ!

4. The Lord Jesus will come with the Tenderness of a Bridegroom.

He does so now in the Invitations of the Gospel, and the Grace that is therein displayed. How melting and endearing are the Arguments he uses, to win Souls to himself? how rich the Grace that is displayed in his Cross! and how powerful the Voice of his Blood! From Heaven God's eternal Son came down, laid aside his Robes of Light and Glory, and the Pomp and Majesty of his Appearance above, and forsook the Worship and Homage paid him, by the adoring Armies there. He left the Father's Bosom, and * *the Fulness of Joy that is in his Presence*, to be † *made Flesh*, to become a poor, helpless, persecuted Infant, ‡ *a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*, to be despised and rejected of Men, mocked, insulted, scourged, spit upon (Oh amazing Shame! yet so was God's own eternal Son treated), and at length crucified and murdered. All this he voluntarily condescended to undergo, that he might ransom us from that everlasting Destruction which Sin had deserved: He gave himself for us into the Hands of Divine Justice, to expiate our Offences, to reconcile us to God by his Blood, and purchase

* Psal. xvi. 11.

† John i. 14.

‡ Isa. liii. 3.

12 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

for us Pardon and everlasting Life. * *He bare our Sins in his own Body on the Tree; † and the Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, that by his Stripes we might be healed.* By all the Agonies he endured, by the precious Streams of his flowing Blood, by the blessed Purchase of his Death, he condescends to beseech and intreat Men to surrender themselves to him as his. He appears with inexpressible Tenderneſs, in the Invitations of his Word, particularly *John vi. 37. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out; and John vii. 37. In the last Day, that great Day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any Man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and Matt. xi. 28. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you Rest.*

But he will especially appear with the most endearing Tenderneſs to his People, at the great Day of his second Coming; He will assign them a most honourable Place at his own right Hand, in the View of all the Hosts of Heaven, Earth, and Hell; and in the Audience of that amazing Assembly, he will take the most gracious Notice of all that they have done for the Honour of his Name, for the Service of his Cause, and for the Advantage of his Members, from a Principle of Duty and Affection to him; and he

* 1 Pet. ii. 24.

† Isa. liii. 5.

will own it as done to himself; according to the gracious Representation, Ver. 35, 36. of this Chapter, *For I was an hungered, and ye gave me Meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me Drink; I was a Stranger and ye took me in; Naked, and ye cloathed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in Prison, and ye came unto me.* He will pronounce upon them, * *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, from the Foundation of the World;* and he will take them with him, in the Sight of the Multitudes of his and their envious, raging, and despairing Enemies, to everlasting Life and Glory; and put them in Possession of those holy Mansions, which he is now preparing for them, and of that Kingdom, which his Blood has purchased for them.

5. The Lord Jesus will come with the Pleasure of a Bridegroom.

It will not only be a Day of the utmost Pleasure, and abundant Joy, to the Saints, but to the Saviour himself: which is represented to us, under the Emblem of Solomon's Joy and Glory, in the Day of his Espousals, Cant. iii. 11. *Go forth ye Daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, with the Crown wherewith his Mother crowned him, in the Day of his Espousals, in the Day of the Gladness of his Heart.* 'Tis most condescending and gracious Language, which the blessed God uses towards his People now, Psalm

* Matth. xxv. 34.

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* Matth. xxv. 34.

14 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

*cxlvii. 11. The Lord taketh Pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his Mercy. and Psalm cxlix. 4. For the Lord taketh Pleasure in his People, he will beautify the Meek with Salvation. But how much more will he take Pleasure in them, when they shall be altogether such as he would have them; when they shall be freed from all their Imperfections, and be compleatly formed into his own Image! Then shall that Word be fulfilled in its utmost Glory, in the gracious Regards, both of the Father and the Son to the Saints, and their Pleasure in them, Isaiah xliii. 4. Since thou wast precious in my Sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; and Isaiah lxii. 5. As the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the Bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee; and that wonderful Word, Zeph. iii 17. He will rejoice over thee with Joy, he will rest in his Love, he will Joy over thee with Singing. Then shall the Redeemer * see of the Travel of his Soul, and be satisfied, and then shall he behold with the utmost Pleasure, the Fruit of all his Pain, and the Efficacy of his Blood upon all that love him: when he shall † present them to himself, a glorious Church, not having Spot, or Wrinkle, or any such Thing, but holy and without Blemish.*

Such is the View which these Words give us of the Character and Coming of Christ as a Bridegroom: But before I take Leave of

* Isaiah. liii, 11.

† Eph. v. 27.

this

this Head, and enter upon the second, I offer some Improvement of what has been already said.

1. Is Christ a Bridegroom, let immortal Souls be persuaded to receive him as such.

As it is the great Design of the Gospel, to espouse Souls to Christ, I would most earnestly press this important Point, and beseech you by the most cogent Motives, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Bridegroom of your Souls.

Motives are not wanting; they are the most numerous and weighty that can ever be urged upon any Occasion. View him in his Person: He is altogether lovely; every Thing gracious, every Thing amiable centers in our Divine Redeemer; in him Godhead and Manhood, the Glory of Divinity, and the Compassion of Humanity, meet in the most wonderful Union. View him in his Dignity; the great Lord of all Things, the Sovereign of Men and Angels; Universal Nature owns his Sway, and every Creature must bow willingly, or unwillingly to his Sceptre. View him in his Character, as most wise, and his Counsel unerring; most holy, without the least Tincture of Sin; full of Love and the tenderest Compassion, of which he has given the most illustrious Demonstrations.

View him in what he has done, to lead your Souls to an Acceptance of him, and Union to him. He came from the Father's
Courts,

Courts, bled, and groaned, and died to purchase your Love; to win your Hearts, and engage you to devote yourselves cordially, and affectionately to him. Observe the Tenderness of his Language to his Servants, the endearing Appellations he gives them, and the gracious Promises he has made them: He will raise every Soul that cordially receives him, to the highest Dignity and Honour; He will make you, if you embrace him as offered in the Gospel, Partakers of his own Glory and Dignity; and introduce you to the highest and most honourable Relations: As he is the Father's equal and eternal Son, you also shall be the Sons and Daughters of the Lord Almighty; the holy Angels, those bright and blessed Spirits, and all the Multitudes of the Saints, that have ever blest the World, and that are now shining Stars in Glory, shall be your Brethren, and united in Bonds of everlasting Relation to you. If you receive Jesus Christ, he will bestow upon you the richest Inheritance; he will make you Kings and Priests, to reign for ever and ever. There shall be no Evil, no Sorrow attending the perfect Union of your Souls to Christ, which must be expected to attend the most desirable mortal Unions; but the Union of holy Souls to the blessed Redeemer, when once compleated, shall be free from every degree of Bitterness, Fear, Sorrow, and sad Apprehension. He ever lives, to constitute

stitute the Portion and Blessedness of his Servants, and will make them Partakers of the Glory of his own immortal Life: *Because I live*, says he *John xiv. 19. Ye shall live also.* View him then, in what he is and will be to you, and will do for you; and say, Is not such a Saviour worthy of your Acceptance, and of the Surrender of yourselves to him? Is not the Blessedness he proposes worthy of your most earnest Pursuit? And is it not the highest Wisdom, and the greatest Interest of every one cordially to receive him?

He has been long inviting you, and calling you by his Gospel. Many of you have had numerous Invitations of this nature given you, and urged with all the pathetick Tenderness and Importunity, that Ministers were capable of; and with the more endearing Pathos of Christ's own Language in his Word: He has sent his Servants one after another, to beseech and entreat you, to give up yourselves to him, and accept the Blessings of an everlasting Relation to him.

Should not all these Arguments prevail? Will you not, O my Friends, give up yourselves to Christ, and receive him as a Bridegroom to you? He cannot be rejected without the utmost Folly, the greatest Guilt, and absolute, final, irrevocable Ruin. Christ must be yours, or you must be for ever undone. Oh that every one therefore would be persuaded, to receive the Lord of Glory, in this

18 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

amiable and endearing Character, as a Bridegroom to his Soul.

2. How unspeakably important is it, to give all Diligence to be found of Christ in Peace at his coming.

Behold he approaches in all his Glory, for Works of amazing Grace to his Friends, and of astonishing Terror to his Enemies. Perhaps to some or other of us, even this very Night, the Midnight Cry may be made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh: In what Condition are we to meet him? Have we received and embraced him, or turned a deaf Ear to his Calls? How immense will the Difference be, betwixt his coming as a Bridegroom, to perfect our Relation to him, and to receive us to everlasting Blessedness in his Presence; and his coming as an Enemy, to exclude us from all the Blessings of his Love, and from every possible Hope, and to execute upon us the most awful Vengeance! Oh think, both Young and Old, seriously think of the amazing Difference. Is it not then worthy of your highest Concern, and utmost Attention, to seek an Interest in him with your whole Hearts and Souls, and to devote yourselves and your all to him, now while he waits to receive you, and to bless you with the everlasting Tokens of his Loving-kindness.

3. Let the Friends of Christ seek, to have the Bonds of their Union to him more manifest and certain, and more abundantly strengthened.

Is.

Is he proclaimed now, and will he shortly appear as a Bridegroom to his People? let us then seek the Temper that becomes those who hope for an Interest in him as such; let us love him more fervently; think of him more frequently, and with more ardent Desire; mourn more for his Absence, and the with-holding the Tokens of his Love from our Souls; and make it evident that we cannot live without him, that his smiles are our Life and Joy, and his Loving-kindness our chosen Portion, and our eternal All. Shall we on the contrary live estranged from him, think little of him, love him but little, mourn but little when he withdraws himself from us, and but little seek the Blessedness of Nearness to him? Is this a Temper becoming those, that expect him to appear, as the Bridegroom of their Souls?

Let us be more studious to honour him, and to be ** filled with the Fruits of Righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the Glory and Praise of God.* And let us more earnestly recommend his Excellence to others, and seek to lead them also to love him.

4. Let the Friends of Christ look to him as their Bridegroom for all that they want.

We are at present in a State of Necessity, Darkness, Danger, and Calamity: The Lord Jesus Christ has enough in himself, to supply all the Wants of his People, however

* Phil. i. 11.

numerous; or however urgent : In him there is a Fulness of Grace, Strength, Comfort, and every thing we need, to make us happy now and for ever. Let us look to his infinite Riches to provide for us, with that Liberality he possesses, and the Gospel proclaims. Let us apply to his Wisdom, to teach us the Way of Holiness and Prudence, in all the various Concerns that arise in Life ; * *He is wise in Heart † and excellent in working,* and known by the Characters of the Prophet of his Church, || *the wonderful Counsellor, § and the Light of the World ;* and the greatest Difficulties, and the most perplexing Circumstances to us, are infinitely easy to him. Let us look to his Strength to strengthen our Weakness ; to fit us for all the Duties of Life ; to bear us up under all its Burdens ; to protect us from all our Dangers ; and to make us ‡ *more than Conquerors* over our spiritual Enemies. Let us look to his Love, as a sacred Cordial for our Souls, when sinking under Dejection and Sorrow ; and as the sure Foundation of our Support and Comfort. Let us look to his healing Skill, to heal all the Diseases of our Souls ; to cure the Wounds of Conscience, and to preserve our Spiritual Life in constant Vigour and Activity. Let us look to his Interest with the Father to introduce us with Acceptance before him : He

* Job ix. 4. † Isaiah xxviii. 29. || Isaiah ix. 6.
§ John viii. 12. ‡ Rom. viii. 37.

is * *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*; no Man cometh unto the Father but by him. Would we obtain the Acceptance of our Persons and Duties before God, it must be in his Name: Would we obtain the Blessings we need, and the special Tokens of God's fatherly Love, it must be through the Lord Jesus Christ. And what more engaging Character could he assume, to encourage the Views of his Servants to him, for all that they want, than this, of the Bridegroom of their Souls, that loves them with the most tender Affection, and that is able and ready to do every thing for them that they stand in Need of?

5. Let Souls united to Christ think often with Joy and Gratitude of his future Appearance.

The present Relation that holy Souls stand in to Christ is a glorious Relation, and fruitful of the justest Matter for the most delightful Reflection: But when we consider in what Manner he will hereafter appear; when we reflect upon the Glory of his Coming, upon the Love which he will shew to his Servants, and the abundant Blessedness with which he will crown them, what a powerful Relief will it afford under all the Sorrows and Distresses of Life? He comes, if we have given up ourselves to him, to deliver us from Temptation, and the Buffetings of our great Adversary the Devil: He comes to set us for

* John. xiv. 6.

22 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

ever out of his Reach, and to put an End to all the Complaints and Groanings of his Servants, on account of the Violence of this inveterate Foe. He comes to deliver them from Sin, that worst of Enemies; the Guilt of which has so often terrified their Consciences, and the Power of which requires so many painful Conflicts to get it well broken. He comes to free his People from all Sorrow, to wipe away all their Tears, to deliver them from all present, and to place them above the reach of all future Evil and Fear. And is not the coming of such a Friend worthy to be thought of daily, with the highest Pleasure, and with the utmost Gratitude, and most cordial Love to the Saviour, that has promised thus to appear as our most gracious Benefactor. To look much for his second Appearance, will be a happy Preservative from innumerable Snares and Temptations, and a blessed Support under innumerable Burdens and Sorrows.

Having thus considered the Character and Coming of Christ as the Bridegroom of his People, and endeavoured to make some Improvement of it, I proceed,

II. Briefly to consider the Description here given, of Professors of Religion in general.

We have hitherto been taking a View of Christ in his Glory and his Grace. We are now
to

to take a View of those that bear his Name, to lead us to try and examine ourselves with the utmost Care, with respect to our own State and Temper. We observe then the Professors of Religion are represented here, as Virgins, taking their Lamps, and going forth to meet the Bridegroom : Let us observe the several Parts of this Description.

1. The Professors of Religion are represented as Virgins : That is, as free from any remarkable outward Stain ; and those that are not so, are unworthy even of the general Name of Professors. If we abuse our Senses, and prostitute our Faculties to the Service of Sin, in vain do we call ourselves Christians. The Sabbath-Breaker, the Drunkard, the Unclean, the Unjust, the openly Profane in any respect, whatever they may call themselves, are unworthy to be reckoned among the ten Virgins, Part of whom were Foolish as well as Part Wise. To deserve even the general Name of Professors of Religion, 'tis needful to escape, as the Apostle *Peter* expresses it, *2 Pet. ii. 20. the Pollutions of the World, through the Knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, though the Persons he there speaks of, are supposed not to be sincere, but to be again entangled therein and overcome, with whom the latter End is worse than the Beginning. An outward Decency and Regularity of Behaviour is indeed of great Importance ; but it is not sufficient. Thus far we may go, and yet be

24 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

numbered among the Foolish Virgins; 'Tis possible that we may be far from deserving the Character of notorious Sinners, and yet be equally estranged from that, of the Friends of Christ, and the Heirs of the eternal Blessings he prepares for them.

The Professors of Religion are described,
2. As taking their Lamps.

This seems to imply much more than only bearing the Christian Name, and to represent a fair and shining Profession, a diligent Attendance upon Divine Ordinances, and the Practice of external Duties, reading the Word of God, and calling upon him, both in secret and Family Worship: These Things are necessary to constitute us upon reasonable Grounds, Professors of Religion; and yet this is far from being enough; we may do these Things; we may speak of Religion, express a Regard to it, attend upon all the outward Duties and Ordinances of it; and even upon the sacred Solemnity of the Lord's Supper; and yet our Hearts be insincere, and ourselves numbered among the Foolish Virgins, that can have no Joy at the Appearance of the great Bridegroom, according to our Lord's awful Representation, *Luke xiii. 26, 27. Then shall ye begin to say, we have eat and drank in thy Presence, and thou hast taught in our Streets. But he shall ay, I tell you, I know ye not: depart from me, all ye Workers of Iniquity.* The most sacred Ordinances and solemn Duties
can't

can't protect the Workers of Iniquity, from a dreadful Disappointment, and overwhelming Shame at the Coming of Christ.

3. The Professors of Religion are represented as appearing as the Friends and Servants of the Bridegroom.

Thus all the ten Virgins joined in professing themselves to be such, and to attend upon him, and pay him their Service. In like Manner we may profess to reverence, serve, and love the Lord Jesus Christ; we may speak in exalted Terms of the Dignity of his Person, the inestimable Value of his Offices, the Glory of his Salvation, the Excellence of his Doctrines and Commandments, and the wonderful Riches of his Grace; we may appear to rejoice in his Glory, and in the Espousals of Souls to him; and, as far as the Eye of Man can discern, want none of the Tokens of Affection and Duty to him, which are found in his faithful Servants; and yet, after all, our Hearts may not be right with him. He judges not according to the outward Appearance, not according to what we shew ourselves to Men, but according to what we are in our Hearts and our inward Regards to him.

4. The Professors of Religion are represented as appearing to be waiting and preparing for the Coming of Christ.

These ten Virgins in the Parable before us all went forth to meet the Bridegroom, and
professed

26 *Christ described as the Bridegroom, and*

professed to expect his Coming, and to be preparing for it. In like Manner we may own the Certainty and Solemnity of his Coming, and acknowledge in the strongest Words and most expressive Phrases, the great Concern of being prepared for it; We may be even at Times touched with the Thought, and yet be found unprepared, and numbered among the Foolish Virgins.

The Foolish Virgins undoubtedly expected, and hoped for Admission to the Marriage, as well as the Wise, and had as little Apprehension of being rejected as they. In like Manner we may please ourselves with the Hope of the Happiness of Christ's Servants at his Coming, and have the most confident Expectation of it; and yet Christ may at last pronounce upon us as upon the Foolish Virgins, Verse 12 of this Chapter, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

See then in this Description of the Professors of Religion, an alarming View of what we may be, and yet be finally mistaken, which may naturally lead us to such Reflections as these.

1. How sad is the Case of Multitudes of Mankind, and even of many that sit under the Gospel!

To examine it by this Similitude which our Lord here uses, they come short, far short even of the Character of the Foolish Virgins. How many are there that bear the Christian Name, how many in our worshipping Assemblies

blies themselves that are by no means free from flagrant and notorious Stains! How many are there of whom the Apostle speaks, *1 Tim. v. 24. Some Mens Sins are open beforehand, going before to Judgment!* How many that are shamefully negligent, even of the most manifest Duties! How many that scarce put on any other Appearance, of being the Friends and Servants of Christ, than by their attending sometimes, or perhaps frequently, upon his Ordinances! How many are there, that instead of professing themselves to be waiting and preparing for the Coming of Christ, not only live in the most manifest Forgetfulness of it, but care not even to have the least Mention made of it to them, and give little or no Attention to what can be said upon this Head! Alas! there are many that customarily attend upon divine Ordinances, that have yet no tolerable Pretension to Interest in Christ, or Relation to him: They are certain, absolute, Enemies: Even the Eye of Man sees the Vanity of their Hopes, however confident they may be: And how much more does the Eye of God see it? Is not this the Case of some among you, that are easily known by Christ's general Rule; * *by their Fruits ye shall know them*; easily known for Strangers and Enemies to Christ, by your common Temper and Character? And do you hope for a Part in the Blessedness of the Kingdom of Christ? You

* Matth. vii. 20.

28 *Christ described as a Bridegroom, and*

have not so much Ground for your Hope as the Foolish Virgins themselves : And if their Doom in this Parable of our Lord was sad, how certain, how awful must the Doom of such Persons be ! Oh that Sinners in Zion might now be afraid, before everlasting Horrour shall seize upon them !

2. With what Jealousy of ourselves should this View of Professors of Religion in general inspire us.

Let us call it often to mind, that there were ten Virgins that took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. But five of them were wise, and five foolish ; five were admitted to the Marriage Supper, and five excluded. We may go far in outward Appearances, and yet not be the real Friends of Christ, nor received to his heavenly Kingdom.

“ O my Soul”, let each of us then say with all possible Solemnity, “ what further Evidence hast thou to produce, and build thy Hopes upon ? Hast thou cordially given up thyself to Christ, as the Bridegroom of immortal Souls ? Hast thou received him with the most affectionate and dutiful Regards ? Dost thou love his blessed Majesty ? Art thou studying to please him in all Things ? Is there any thing I would not do, or would not deny myself of at Christ’s Command ? Is there any thing that rivals him in my Heart, or stands in Competition with the Love and Duty I owe him” ? Oh
let

the Professors of Religion as Virgins. 29

let us search our Hearts with the utmost Concern, lest, though we should be numbered among the Virgins, we should be found among the Foolish Ones, and as such be excluded from the Heavenly Marriage.



S E R-

S E R M O N II.

The WISDOM of sincere Christians,

AND

The FOLLY of Hypocrites.

M A T T H. XXV. 2.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

IMPORTANT Distinction ! which divides the World, and particularly the visible Church ; by which it highly concerns every one of us carefully to examine the State of our Souls. The former Verse having given us a View of the Professors of Religion in general, of all that have any claim even to that imperfect Character ; as *Virgins*, free from any remarkable outward Stain ; as *taking their Lamps*, or making a fair shew, by the Practice of external Duties ; as *going forth to meet the Bridegroom*, or appearing as his Friends and Servants, and professing to wait and prepare for his Coming : These Words distinguish those, who agree in such things as these,

but

but differ widely in this most important Respect; some of them are *wise* and some *foolish*.

Thus are the Professors of Religion distinguished from each other. And as to others that don't so much as come up to this Character, that are openly indulging themselves in the grossest Pollutions, that live in the Neglect of the plainest Duties, and scarce so much as in the least pretend to be the Friends, Servants, and Expectants of the Lord Jesus Christ; though they can scarce properly be reckoned among the ten Virgins, yet they are manifestly foolish in the highest Degree, as having no Regard to that which is of the greatest Consequence, and the highest Honour and Happiness that their Natures are capable of.

But leaving these unhappy Creatures, who proclaim their Folly without Shame or Reserve, we are now to attend to this important Distinction, betwixt the nominal Friends of Christ themselves, represented by five Wise, and five Foolish Virgins. Their equal Number may justly give us an Alarm. Does the Lord Jesus represent one Half of those that make an Appearance of Religion, and in whom perhaps mortal Eyes can see no decisive Proof of Hypocrisy, as yet in Reality insincere, and shortly to be detected as such, at the great Day of his Coming? let us fear and tremble for ourselves. Or supposing that we are not to conclude, the Number of sincere

cere and hypocritical Professors to be equal ; yet this Manner of Expression, seems at least strongly to imply, that a great Number, a considerable Proportion of plausible Professors, will be found at last insincere. And with what Circumspection and Distrust of ourselves should such a thought fill us !

They are wise, and they only, whom the Lord Jesus Christ reckons so ; and *they*, the great and only Fools, whom he accounts such : And both the one and the other will shortly appear to have been so, whatsoever the World reckons to the contrary concerning them ; for he is the Faithful and the True Witness, his Judgment is always according to Truth, and when Heaven and Earth are dissolved, his Word shall stand good to the eternal Honour of his Saints, and to the Confusion of Sinners that have scoffed at them, and entertained the most vain, proud, and flattering Thoughts of themselves.

In discoursing on these Words, I propose by divine Assistance to shew,

I. The Wisdom of Sincere Christians. And,

II. The Folly of Hypocritical Professors.

I am, I. To shew the Wisdom of sincere Christians. And it will appear in such Instances as these : They seek and are concerned to follow the Directions of infinite Wisdom---

They

They mind the Substance of Religion more than the Appearance of it ----- They are concerned to secure the most valuable Friendship ----- They are pursuing the sweetest and most durable Pleasures ----- They seek the highest and most lasting Honour ----- They are earnestly laying hold on an eternal Inheritance ----- They mind these important Interests in due Time ----- And they are in Consequence of these Things prepared for all Events.

1. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they seek, and are concerned to follow the Directions of Infinite Wisdom.

It is the first Step to Wisdom, and the first Evidence of it begun in the Mind, to be sensible of our own Folly, and Need of Instruction and Direction, and to seek it where it may be had. With respect to Regard paid to the wise and friendly Counsels of our Fellow Creatures, 'tis a manifest Truth which we read *Prov. xii. 15. The Way of a Fool is right in his own Eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto Counsel is wise; and Prov. xiii. 20. He that walketh with wise Men shall be wise, but a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed.* And it is one of the most evident marks of Folly which is mentioned, *Prov. xv. 12. A Scornor loveth not one that reproveth him, neither will he go unto the Wise.*

But if it is thus, with respect to the partial and imperfect Wisdom of our Fellow Creatures, how much more with respect to

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But if it is thus, with respect to the partial and imperfect Wisdom of our Fellow Creatures, how much more with respect to

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the boundless Wisdom of the blessed God! There's no greater mark of Wisdom, than to hearken to the Counsels of him that is infinitely wise: And they *only* are wise, who are seeking Instruction and Direction from him, and concerned in all Things to be obedient to it. * *The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom, † and to depart from Evil, that is Understanding.* 'Tis the Character of the Saints, *that they incline their Ear, and come to God, and hear, that their Souls may live,* Isaiah lv. 3. His Word is a sacred Treasury of divine Wisdom, the Instruction in the *|| Way of Life*, the Guide to present and eternal Happiness, and that *which is able to make us wise unto Salvation through Faith which is in Christ Jesus*, to refer to 2 Tim. iii. 15. There is not a greater and more evident mark of Folly, than to neglect and slight that divine Directory, that System of holy and unerring Wisdom. They that are truly wise, on the contrary, converse much with it, according to the Opportunity Providence affords: They study this divine Rule, and seek to have it engraven upon their Hearts: They make it their *Counsellor ‡*, to which they have recourse, to learn their Duty and their true Interest, to be directed and quickened to pursue it, and to be guarded against those things which would be pernicious or injurious to

* Psal. cxl. 10. † Job xxviii. 28. || Prov. vi. 23.

‡ Psalm. cxix. 24.

them :

them: They love the Word of God; 'tis more precious to them *than thousands of Gold and Silver**, *sweeter than Honey and the Honey-comb†*. They can't be content to let it lie neglected long together, but must be returning to it from Time to Time, for new Instruction, Quickening and Comfort.

They are concerned to be in all Things obedient to it; there the Lord of Glory condescends, to give them the most needful and most valuable Counsel upon many Occasions: *I counsel thee*, says the blessed Redeemer in particular to the Church of Laodicea, *Rev. iii. 18. to buy of me Gold tried in the Fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white Raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the Shame of thy Nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine Eyes with Eye-Salve, that thou mayest see.* To these and other important Counsels and Commands of the Word of God, 'tis the great Concern of sincere Christians, to yield the most dutiful Regard; and 'tis the Object of their earnest Prayer, and humble and constant Endeavour, to be in all Things conformed to the Will of God, as revealed in his Word, and to maintain a continual ‡ *Respect to all his Commandments.*

In like Manner, from a Sense of their own Weakness, and Need of Divine Guidance in all their Ways, they will humbly seek it at the Throne of Grace, to preserve them from

* Psal. cxix. 72. † Psal. xix. 10. ‡ Psal. cxix. 6.

the Devices of Satan, and lead them in the Way that shall be most safe, most wise, most honourable to Religion, and most happy to themselves, both for Time and Eternity. And they are concerned that their Appetites and Passions, and worldly Interests may not prevail, to turn them aside from the Way of Wisdom and of Holiness, in which they seek and pray to be led.

2. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they mind the Substance of Religion more than the Appearance of it.

Thus the Wise Virgins in the Parable, were not content to take their Lamps, and make a present Show, but took Care to have a sufficient Supply for them for the future. 'Tis evidently a Part of Wisdom, with regard to the Affairs of this Life, to be much more solicitous about the Substance, than the Appearance of Things, in which our Interest is in any important Degree concerned. And in this Respect sincere Christians are truly wise: They will indeed in Obedience to the divine Command endeavour, that ** their Light may so shine before Men, that others seeing their good Works, may glorify their Father which is in Heaven.* They will dread being ashamed of Christ and his Cause, remembering his own solemn Declaration, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful*

** Matth. v. 16.*

Generation,

Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels. But they equally dread being like the Pharisees, that † *did all their Works to be seen of Men.* They remember that they have to do with an omniscient God, who can't be deceived, and will || *not be mocked*; with whom the fairest Appearances will be of no Avail, without a Heart sincerely devoted to his Fear, and warmed with Love and Duty to him. 'Tis of much more Importance in their Esteem, to get Sin happily mortified; to obtain some clear and certain Evidence, of an Interest in the Love of God; to have ‡ *Fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ*; and their * *Affections* weaned from *the Earth* and *set upon Things above*; than to maintain the fairest Appearances imaginable, in the Eyes of their Fellow-Creatures: 'Tis sufficient to them to enjoy such sacred Riches, such divine Entertainment within, whether Men discover it or not; and though Men should slight or censure them, they regard such Blessedness as an abundant Overballance for it.

3. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they are careful to secure the most valuable Friendship.

It was the Wisdom of the Wise Virgins, that they sought and cultivated the Friend-

† Matth. xxiii. 5. || Gal. vi. 7. ‡ 1 John i. 3. Col. iii. 2.

ship of the Bridegroom, and proved themselves his Friends, by being ready to wait upon him whenever he should come. Much of our Wisdom or Folly appears in the Choice of our Friends, according to their Wisdom or Folly, their Holiness, or Sinfulness, and their Power and Readiness to help us, on the one Hand; or their Inability, or Want of Disposition to do it, on the other. But how wise is it to choose, and earnestly seek, the Friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is most wise, most holy, and able to do us the most important Good!

'Tis his unspeakable Condescension and Grace, that he is ready to receive us to the Blessings of his Friendship, and bestows this endearing Appellation on his People. Thus He says to his Disciples, *Luke xii. 4. I say unto you, my Friends, be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do; and again, John xv. 14, 15. Ye are my Friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not Servants, for the Servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you Friends, for all Things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.* How surprising is it to hear the only begotten of the Father, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, speak such Language to Worms; and not only to his Disciples that followed Him in his personal Ministry, but to all that should hereafter believe on him!

him! and what excessive Folly must it be, to slight such gracious Overtures of so divine a Friendship!

'Tis the earnest Concern of all sincere Christians, that they may indeed partake of the Blessings of it, and there's nothing they so much dread as falling short of it: They are therefore solicitous to approve themselves Christ's Friends and Servants, and to shew that they love him indeed; they study to please him; they seek the Advancement of his Honour; they deny themselves for his Sake; and labour to maintain constant regard to him, and to keep up a holy Intercourse with him: They would far rather incur the Displeasure of Men, and even of those on whom they have the greatest Dependence, than the Displeasure of the Lord Jesus Christ; rightly judging that it is far better to * *obey God than Man*. And herein they act a Part of the truest Wisdom, as no Friendship in the World can afford them any comparable Benefit to that of the Lord Jesus.

4. Sincere Christians are wise, as they are pursuing the sweetest and most durable Pleasures.

The Wise Virgins sought the Pleasures of the Royal Marriage in a proper Manner, nor were they disappointed of them as the foolish were. 'Tis the inexpressible Folly of Sinners, that they have set their Hearts upon carnal

* Acts v. 29.

sensual Pleasures; on Gratifications which even the Brutes are capable of, in common with them; or at least upon Pleasures of the most transient and uncertain Duration, and at the same Time, of the most unsatisfying, if not also of the most dangerous and pernicious Nature.

What are the Pleasures of the World, but short, present, and momentary? How soon must they vanish! If life is continued, Old Age will soon destroy all Relish for the Pleasures that this Life can afford. Harken therefore, my Young Friends, to that important Counsel of Infinite Wisdom, *Eccl. xii. 1. Remember now thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth, while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no Pleasure in them.* And as Age destroys in a great Measure the Sinner's Relish for his Pleasures, so Death will certainly put a total End to them, and shut him up under a Sentence of everlasting Woe, and hopeless irremediable Anguish: And the Pleasures of Sin are ripening the Sinner for this dreadful Doom, as some understand that Word, *James v. 5. Ye have lived in Pleasure on the Earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your Hearts as in a Day of Slaughter.* Which Dr. Doddridge thus paraphrases, "*As Beasts are fed for a Day of Slaughter.*" *

* Family Expositor in Loc.

But

But it is the Wisdom of sincere Christians, that they are seeking Pleasures, of a Nature unspeakably superiour on a Variety of Accounts; and particularly more sweet for the present, than any which the Ways of Sin can possibly afford. There's no Manner of Comparison betwixt the Gratifications of Sense, and the sacred Entertainments which the Saints receive from God: The former are like the Husks that Swine eat; but the latter are the Entertainments of Heaven and its glorious Inhabitants, the Foretastes of eternal Bliss, and the * *Earnests* of that Divine *Inheritance*. All that have tasted both the Pleasures of Sin in their un sanctified State, and the Pleasures of Religion in their renewed and sanctified State, will give an entire Preference to the latter, with respect to their present Sweetness.

And they are unspeakably preferable with respect to the Effect of them. The Pleasures of Sin leave a Sting behind them, and give the most dreadful Wounds to the Conscience, which are often long felt in the present World, and if not in this World, yet will be felt for ever in that which is to come, and throb with eternal Anguish. But the Pleasures of Religion afford the sweetest and most peaceful Reflections: It gives new Joy to the Mind in the future Scenes of Life, in Affliction, in Age, in Death itself, to be able to reflect,

* Eph. i. 14.

upon the Pleasures which the Soul has had in the Promises of God, in waiting upon him at the Footstool of his Throne, in Obedience to him, Communion with him, and the Manifestations of his Love : It affords a fair Evidence of Interest in him, and furnishes a happy Support on many Occasions of great Sorrow. These sacred Pleasures lead us into no Snares, no Dangers, no future Grief and Disquietude ; as the Pleasures of Sin often do its wretched Votaries : They * *add no Sorrow* afterwards, but on the contrary renewed Peace and unspeakable Comfort.

And the Pleasures of Religion have another grand Advantage ; that they shall shortly be perfected, and endure for ever, while the Sinner's Pleasures fade, drop, die for ever, and end in Heart-rending and eternal Anguish ; the Entertainments of Religion terminate in the † *Fulness of Joy* that is in God's Presence, and the Pleasures that are at his right Hand for evermore. How truly wise then are they that seek such Pleasures, and are content to abandon meaner, shorter, and destructive Pleasures for the sake of these !

5. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they seek the highest and the most lasting Honour.

It was the Honour of the Wise Virgins to be admitted to the Marriage, which they had been taking proper Methods to secure, and

* Prov. x. 22. † Psal. xvi. 11.

the Shame of the Foolish that they were by their own Folly excluded from it. The Honour which is from Men, is one of the Objects which Sinners are pursuing, to the absolute Neglect of that which is from God. But what is it at most but a puff of empty Wind? Much less in general, than the Sinners own Imaginations make it for the present, and must soon vanish for ever; and what an amazing Difference is there betwixt the Honour of God's Approbation, and the Applause of our Fellow-Creatures!

What an Honour was it to *Noah*, when God said of him, *Gen. vii. 1. For thee have I seen righteous before me in this Generation!* What an Honour to *Abraham*, when God said of him, *Gen. xviii. 19. For I know him, that he will command his Children and his Household after him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him!* What an Honour was it to *Job*, when God said of him to *Satan*, *Job, i. 8. Hast thou considered my Servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man, one that feareth God, and escheweth Evil?* What an Honour to *David*, when God pronounced him * *a Man after his own Heart!* What an Honour to the Angel of the Church of *Smyrna*, when the Lord Jesus Christ pronounced concerning him,

* 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

44 *The Wisdom of sincere Christians,*

I know thy Poverty, but thou art rich. Rev. ii. 9. Amazing Difference betwixt *Christ's* saying so of him, and the Angel of the Church of the *Laodiceans* saying of himself, Rev. iii. 17. *I am rich and increased with Goods, and have need of nothing,* when *Christ* pronounces him, on the contrary, *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!* Oh what a trifle is it to be pronounced by our Fellow-Creatures strong, brave, beautiful, wise, learned, ingenious, religious, or in any other respect excellent, in comparison with a divine Testimony!

And as this is the truest Honour at present, so it will shortly appear to be so, at the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will then put the utmost Honour upon his Servants, and confess them before his Father and the holy Angels. He will own them as precious in his Sight, and the Objects of his tenderest and most gracious Regards; as those that have loved and served him, that have been supremely concerned to approve their Hearts to him, and * *continued with him*, and adhered to him, *through the various Temptations and Difficulties* to which their mortal Pilgrimage was exposed. In that Day, when all the Honours of this World shall vanish like Smoke, when the Prince and the Beggar shall stand upon a Level before their Judge; there will be an immense Difference, betwixt sincere Christians and formal hypocritical Professors.

* Luke xxii. 28.

The Honour of the Saints, at the great Day of the Coming of their Lord, shall be unspeakably more extensive, and spread wider, than the Honour of the greatest Monarchs or Warriours upon Earth ever did. It shall be proclaimed before all the innumerable Inhabitants of Heaven, Earth, and Hell; and every individual Creature shall be a Witness of the Honour Christ will put upon them in that Day: And it is Honour that shall flourish in immortal Glory, and endure to Eternity.

This is the Honour which sincere Christians are seeking with supreme Concern. 'Tis by no means their view in Religion to be applauded of Men; and though, through the remainder of Corruption, they find it sometimes difficult, to keep so mean and unworthy a View out of their Thoughts, yet they reject it with Indignation, humbly beg Pardon before God for it, and seek to be more intirely animated by supreme Regards to the invisible God, and to keep all other Views in Subordination to the great View of approving themselves to him. They will not deliberately do any Thing in *secret*, from which the Fear of Men would restrain them in *publick*; or leave any Thing undone which their Duty requires, when there is no Motive to it from the Favour of Men, any more than they would when there is the strongest: 'Tis of far more Importance in their Account to please God, than Men; and obtain the Honour that

is from *him*, than that which is from *them*. 'Tis to them comparatively * *a small Thing to be judged of Man's Judgment*, since *he that judges them is the Lord*: To be accepted of *him*, and obtain the everlasting Honours that he will shortly put upon his faithful Servants, is the Object of their grand Concern and Pursuit. Thus they are described, *Rom. ii. 7.* As those *who by patient Continuance in Well-doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, to whom God will render eternal Life.* And they herein manifestly act worthy of the highest Wisdom.

6. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they are earnestly laying hold on an eternal Inheritance.

They know by undeniable Evidence, and are taught by the holy Ghost wisely to consider, that they † *have here no continuing City*, and are therefore concerned to *seek one to come*. They know they have here no lasting Enjoyments, and are therefore solicitous, to secure || *a better and an enduring Substance in Heaven*. On this they set their Hearts, as the Object of their most earnest Desire; they dread the Thought of missing of it, and would not fail of the Enjoyment of it, for ten thousand Worlds: And in pursuit of it, they use the Means which the Wisdom of God has directed. They dare not, they cannot satisfy themselves, with the Hope and Desire of the Slug-

* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. † Heb. xiii. 14. || Heb. x. 34.
gard

gard which slays him; but are concerned * *to lay hold on eternal Life* indeed. They deny themselves, and watch and pray against Sin; seek to have it mortified within; and are afraid of every thing, that threatens to exclude them from the heavenly Inheritance. They hear, read, pray, meditate, and attend the various Ordinances and Duties of the Word, with a diligent Concern not to neglect any thing God requires of them, or omit any of the Means of his Appointment, to obtain an everlasting Inheritance. They look to *Jesus* †, to his divine Character as their Pattern, to his Righteousness as the Source of their Pardon and Acceptance, and to his Strength to assist them in every Duty, and render them superiour to all Opposition. They seek to have their || *Conversation* more and more in *Heaven*, and their Souls more thoroughly conformed, to the perfect Model drawn in the Gospel; and they endure as having ‡ *respect unto the Recompence of Reward*. Herein they act a Part which will appear to have been truly wise, when they enter upon that glorious Kingdom, which the Blood of *Jesus* has purchased, and his Grace and Faithfulness has promised to all that are earnestly seeking it.

7. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they mind these important Interests in due Time.

* 2. Tim. vi. 19. † Heb. xii. 2. || Phil. iii. 20.

‡ Heb. xi. 26.

One very great Part of Wisdom consists, in attending to the proper Time and Season of Things. If we expect to obtain any of the Advantages of the present Life, we must seek them in due Season; and a great deal of the Folly of the World consists, in suffering the proper Seasons of obtaining many important Ends, to slip away.

The present Life is the Time appointed for us to seek and obtain the spiritual and eternal Blessings of the Covenant of God. The God of all Wisdom and Grace warns us of it in the most solemn manner: * *Whatsoever thy Hand findeth to do, do it with thy Might; for there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave whither thou goest.* The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ inculcates it upon us; † *I must work the Works of him that sent me, while it is Day; since the Night cometh wherein no Man can work.* The Gospel solemnly calls us to it: ‡ *To-day if ye will hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts.*

Herein consists one great Difference betwixt Sinners and Saints. Sinners, when they come upon their Death-beds, and are just ready to appear before their Judge, are often alarmed and terrified, and earnestly intreat Pardon and Mercy: They lament their excessive Folly in wasting the precious Time of Life, and cry with great Importunity for a little more Time; which in many Instances,

* Eccl. ix. 10. † John ix. 4. ‡ Heb. iii. 15.
the

the Wisdom of God does not see fit to give, and where he does give it, the Sinner appears still, as much under the Influence of his Folly as ever, and wastes and fools away the remaining Time, which God condescends to give him.

But it is the Wisdom of sincere Christians, that they are concerned to improve the present Season and Means of Grace, while Life and Health continue; and, blessed be God, some among us, I hope, were taught to improve that most advantageous Season, *Youth*, for the Service of God. They on the contrary, are acting a Part of the greatest Folly and Danger, that are suffering their early and advantageous Days, to pass away without Regard to so great a Concern. O my Young Friends, would you be wise, improve the present time of Youth: Perhaps you may not have any other Time, and if you have, instead of improving it, you will be in Danger of having it only to treasure up Wrath, against the Day of Wrath, through the growing Hardness of your Hearts, and more inveterate Power of Sin.

Sincere Christians dread the Thought of having the present Time pass, without some proper Improvement of it. Thus the Wise Virgins were careful to have Oil in their Vessels early enough, before the Bridegroom came; but the foolish Virgins were content to let it alone, till, as it appeared by the Event,

it was too late; till the Midnight Cry was made, behold the Bridegroom cometh; and then they in vain sought a Supply, and in vain sought to enter in to the Marriage.

8. Sincere Christians are truly wise, as they are in consequence of these things prepared for all Events.

They know not what is before them in Life; but they have a God to go to, in whatsoever Trials they may be exercised with; Promises to hope and trust in; and blessed Ground for the Expectation of eternal Life, to put a Period to all their Sorrows. They know not when their Lord will come; but let him come at his own Time; they are not liable to the dreadful Surprise, of those that are destitute of an inward Principle of Love and Duty to him. They have been employing themselves, in some humble Measure, though with many Imperfections, in his Service, and are therefore prepared to serve him for ever, when he shall call them to that blessed Employment. They have been seeking the Enjoyment of him, as their most desired Entertainment upon Earth, and may therefore enter with Pleasure, on the Enjoyment of him above, whensoever he shall come. Let him send his Summons when he pleases, to call them to appear before him; they have learnt by his Grace, to make that Preparation for his Coming, which shall prevent any such Anguish and Terrour, as shall seize the Hypocrite

pocrite in that Day. They may indeed be in some Degree alarmed, as the Wise Virgins may be justly supposed to have been, at the Bridegroom's Approach, when they had been slumbering, and sleeping with the foolish: And would we avoid every Degree of Surprise and Fear, at the Coming of Christ, let us take heed of slumbering, and sleeping in his Service. But the Soul that is indeed devoted to him, that honours him as its Lord, and loves and longs after him, as its Portion and Happiness, shall not be fatally surprised, but stand with Acceptance and Honour before him at his Coming.

Having thus shewn, in a Variety of Particulars, the Wisdom of sincere Christians, I proceed,

II. To shew, on the other Hand, the Folly of hypocritical Professors.

And we might here particularly review the Things that have been said, and observe just the Reverse, to the Character of sincere Christians, as that of hypocritical Professors of Religion: If the Conduct and Temper of the one is wise, that of the other must be proportionably foolish. But instead of this, I offer a short sketch of the Folly of the latter in the following Observations; and after what has been said on the Wisdom of the former, a few Hints *for the present* of the Folly of the

latter, will be sufficient abundantly to shew its monstrous Absurdity. I observe then that they are content with an outward Appearance alone --- they make no Provision for Futurity---and they sleep secure in the most dangerous and deplorable Condition.

1. Hypocritical Professors are content with an outward Appearance alone.

'Tis a great Degree of Folly in any Circumstance, or upon any Occasion, to suffer a bare Appearance, to stand in competition with any real and important Good. But what excess of Folly is it, to suffer our Attention to be engrossed by the former, to the total and constant neglect of the latter! Such is the Case of hypocritical Professors of Religion: 'tis sufficient for them to appear religious to Men; to keep up *a Form of Godliness*, without any Regard to *the Power of it* *; to have *a Name to live* †, though without any Concern about an inward Principle of spiritual Life. They are content to be called Christians, without any thing of the Temper of Christ in them; and to be reckoned among his Servants, without paying him any Honour or real cordial Obedience. They are content to *appear* to be seeking the Glory of the World to come, without any Solitude to make sure of a Title to it, or any *real* Preparation for it. Thus they fatally deceive their *own Souls*, while they impose upon *others* with *Appear-*

* 2 Tim. iii. 5.

† Rev. iii. 5.

ances;

ances; and it is certainly inexpressible Folly, thus to rest satisfied in a Form, without any thing real, and lose the Substance for the Shadow.

2. Hypocritical Professors make no Provision for Futurity.

The Lamps of the foolish Virgins might give as good a Light, for the present, as those of the wise; but it was their great Folly, that they had provided no Oil in their Vessels, to maintain their Splendour, till the Bridegroom should come, if he thought proper to delay, as the wise Virgins had done.

A sincere Christian is concerned to have such a Principle of Grace within, as may bear him through all the Trials, to which he may be exposed in Life. He will be often ready to say, If I should be called to such Trials as many of God's Servants have been, could I stand like them, and endure to the End as they did? He earnestly begs Grace for every future Circumstance of Life, and Strength equal to his Day, whatsoever it may be.

The Hypocrite, on the contrary, is not concerned to provide for future Trials; he is content with a temporary and present Provision, and leaves Futurity to provide for itself. But it is the grossest and most pernicious Instance of his Folly, that he makes no Provision for the eternal Futurity before him. He is going to a World, where no kind of Profession will avail him any thing, unless

supported by an inward Principle of saving Grace; but he is not concerned about it, nor solicitous to be approved of the great Judge at his coming. He studies not that great Point, how matters will stand with him at the Coming of the Lord Jesus, whether he is renewed in the Spirit of his Mind, and has Christ's Image instamped upon his Soul; whether he is an Heir of Promise, and has a Title to the Glory which Christ has purchased and promised to his Servants. 'Tis the inexpressible Folly of all that are in a State of Sin, and particularly of hypocritical Professors of Religion, that they have, and they know they have, an eternal State of Being before them, and yet are unconcerned, *to lay up in Store a good Foundation for the time to come**, and to make sure of something to live upon to Eternity.

3. They sleep secure in the most dreadful, and deplorable Condition.

It was the Folly of the wise Virgins to slumber and sleep, though they had Oil in their Vessels: But how much greater was that of the foolish, who had made no such Provision, and yet slept as easy and quiet as they that had. Thus careless Sinners in general, and hypocritical Professors in many Instances, even in a greater degree than others, sleep secure, while in Reality they are in the most deplorable Condition imaginable: The

* 1 Tim. vi. 19.

latter amuse and satisfy themselves with an Attendance upon Ordinances, and the practice of external Duties ; with a Name, and perhaps Esteem among Men as Christians ; while in Reality * *the Wrath of God abides upon them*. Hell is ready to open its Mouth, and swallow them up ; and the great Judge ready to appear and blast all their Hopes at once, † *with the Spirit of his Mouth and the Brightness of his Coming*. Oh that it was possible to convince every unconverted Sinner amongst us, of the Terrours of such a Condition. Would you sleep on the Top of a Mast, on the Verge of a Precipice, or on the Brink of a burning Furnace ? And yet this would be no comparable Folly, with what it is to be careless and secure while you are out of Christ, destitute of an Interest in his Righteousness and Grace, and your Souls in Danger of perishing for ever.

Having thus shewn both the Wisdom of sincere Christians, and the Folly of hypocritical Professors of Religion, I conclude with the following Improvement of what has been said.

I. How highly does it concern us to inquire whether we are numbered among the wise or foolish Virgins.

The Lord Jesus Christ very remarkably represents their Number as equal ; probably intimating, as has been before observed, that

* John iii. 36.

† 2 Theff. ii. 8.

there is a great Proportion among the plausible Professors of Religion that will be found insincere. Should it be my own Case, let every one of us seriously say to ourselves, how dreadful would be my Mistake? How amazingly tremendous the Consequence? Who can let this important Doubt remain unanswered, Am I wise in Christ's Account, or foolish? Foolish for my Soul, and foolish for Eternity?

Here then let us seriously inquire, Do we bear the Marks of the truly wise? Are we seeking and concerned, with our whole Hearts, to follow the Directions of infinite Wisdom? Are we taking the Word of God as our Guide, studying universal Conformity to it, and seeking to discover every false Way, and every flattering deceitful Hope? Are we bringing ourselves frequently to this Divine Standard, and crying to God for the Teachings and Guidance of his blessed Spirit? Let us ask again, Are we indeed not so much concerned about what Men think of us, as about what in Reality we are, and what God the all-wise and decisive Judge sees us to be? Does Conscience witness for us, that this is our grand Concern to be such as God will approve? Are we seeking his Favour in preference to every other Object? Are we ready to deny ourselves of meaner Things, for the rich Entertainments of his Love? Are we willing rather to be scorned and reproached of Men, than in any thing to be guilty of
Disregard

Disregard to the Honour that is from God? Are we concerned to * *lay earnest hold on eternal Life*, and to make sure of that blessed Inheritance? Are we improving the present Time, and afraid of letting one Day after another pass away in vain, with the Hope of having more time allowed us? If so, we have great Encouragement to hope, that we shall indeed be found ready when our Lord comes.

But the contrary, I fear, is the Case of some that hear me: Are you not flattering yourselves, one Time after another, in such a Manner as this? “ I hope I shall be
“ better hereafter; I intend to forsake this
“ and that Lust; I intend, when I am older,
“ or have more leisure, or am got over some
“ of my present Fatigues, to mind the things
“ of God, and the Concerns of my Soul”. If this is the Case, you certainly stand chargeable with the grossest Folly, and are running the most tremendous Risk. Would you be wise, be wise betimes: Hear God’s Voice To-day, lest you be numbered at last among the foolish Virgins.

2. Let those who are concerned to be wise indeed, seek it in the Way of God’s Appointment.

Are any of your Consciences struck with a Sense of the Importance of your being found among the wise, instead of the foolish Vir-

* 1 Tim. vi. 19.

gins? Study well that divine System of Wisdom, the Word of God; have recourse to it as your Counsellor; apply to the Throne of Grace; confess and lament your Folly, and cry to him that is infinitely wise, to make you wise for your Souls: Associate yourselves with those that are wise, seek their Counsel and Direction, and intreat their Admonitions, Watchfulness, and Reproof, with respect to the Folly they may see in you: Shun the Way of the Foolish, that you may live; and forsake the Company of those that are leading, or would lead you, in the Ways of Folly and of Sin. But if on the contrary you will still neglect the Word of God, and neglect crying to him, or will shun the Company of his Servants, and choose that of Sinners; you certainly are not in earnest concerned to be wise.

3. Let those whom the Grace of God has made wise, thankfully acknowledge the Favour, and be thereby animated and encouraged to seek an Increase of Wisdom from him.

'Tis an unspeakable Favour if God has made any of us truly wise, and gratefully to be owned as such; but there is yet much Folly bound up in our Hearts; we have yet need of much further Instruction and Wisdom from above. From a deep Sense therefore of our remaining Foolishness, let us go often, and with much Importunity, to God for the Cure of it; and plead his Promises, and what we have Reason to hope he has already done for

us; nor let the painful Experience we have of the Greatness of the Folly yet remaining in our Hearts, discourage us: He that has begun to teach us, will certainly be ready to hearken to the Cries we offer before him, for further Instruction. Let us study more and more those Oracles of Wisdom, by which we have been in any measure taught already; let us seek to have them more thoroughly engraven upon our Hearts, and every Thought directed by them.

And let us be particularly careful, while we profess to be wise for our Souls and Eternity, to make it manifest to others, by our whole Temper and Conduct, that we are so in Reality, by maintaining our Affection and Duty to the blessed God; by our Watchfulness to please him in every thing; by seeking to recommend Wisdom's Ways to those about us; and by our Dread of every thing that might be a Stumbling-block to them.

S E R M O N III.

The FOLLY of Hypocrites further
represented.

M A T T H. XXV. 3.

*They that were foolish took their Lamps, and
took no Oil with them.*

TO be mistaken in the Hopes we entertain of eternal Salvation, would be the most tremendous Mistake into which we can possibly fall. Every one that bestows the least Attention upon the Importance of that Hope, must acknowledge it; but amidst the most ready and unfeigned Acknowledgements of it, 'tis possible that we may remain so little touched with the Danger of it, as actually to fall into it. To guard us therefore effectually against so fatal a Delusion, 'tis needful that we should have a deep Sense, of the Danger we are in, of falling into it, and of the dreadful Consequences that would attend it.

This

This is set before us in the most awakening Light, in this solemn Parable of our Lord's; Part of which we have been already considering; and particularly representing last Lord's Day, the Wisdom of sincere Christians, and the Folly of mere outward Professors of Religion. But these are Themes of so interesting a Nature, that they claim our further Attention. And Oh that God may help us by his good Spirit, so to attend to them, that we may learn the greatest Watchfulness and Caution, and be effectually preserved from deceiving our own Souls!

In discoursing on this part of the Parable before us, I propose, by Divine Assistance, to consider this particular Instance of the Folly of the foolish Virgins, this most evident Demonstration of it, their taking their Lamps and taking no Oil with them, when they went forth in the Evening, to wait for, and attend the Bridegroom, whensoever he should please to come; or the inexpressible Folly of resting in a bare Profession of Religion, without an inward Principle of Grace, which plainly seems to be what our Lord intended in this Passage; and the Folly of it will appear in a striking Light, from a Variety of Considerations, and in particular from such as these. If we content ourselves with a bare Profession of Religion, we shall thereby lose all the Pleasure which the Truth and Reality of it affords --- We shall miss of all its present inestimable

ble Privileges ---- We shall lose all our Pains in the outward Exercises of it ---- We shall perhaps be reproached and suffer Injuries as Christians, without being such ---- We shall lie open to a great and dreadful Surprise at the Day of the Coming of Christ ---- That Day will certainly discover us ---- We shall come short of Heaven at last ---- We shall incur the righteous Indignation of the great Bridegroom ---- And we shall be exposed to the greatest Contempt.

1. If we rest in a bare outward Profession, we shall lose all the Pleasures that are to be found in real Religion.

Wisdom's Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace, Prov. iii. 17. There are no Pleasures in the World worthy of any Comparison with those that are to be found in the good Ways of God. How often does the *Psalmist* express the sacred Delight which he found therein? Thus he says, *Psal. xliii. 4. Then will I go unto the Altar of God, unto God my exceeding Joy; and Psal. lxiii. 5. My Soul shall be satisfied as with Marrow and Fatness, and my Mouth shall praise thee with joyful Lips; and Psal. lxxiii. 28. But it is good for me to draw near to God; and Psal. cxix. 72. The Law of thy Mouth is better unto me than thousands of Gold and Silver; and, to add no more, he says, Ver. 103. How sweet are thy Words unto my Taste! yea sweeter than Honey to my Mouth.* Coming to God in Prayer and
Thanksgiving,

Thanksgiving, meditating upon him, conversing about him, and attending upon the Ordinances of the Gospel, have upon many Occasions been very sweet and delightful to the Souls of his Servants. And that has been the frequent rejoicing of the Saints, which was the Apostle's, 2 Cor. i. 12. viz. *The Testimony of their Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, they have had their Conversation in the World.* This has often been the happy Effect of close and serious Self-Examination, according to what the Apostle says, Gal. vi. 4. *But let every Man prove his own Work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.* An approving God, and an approving Conscience, will yield such Pleasure, as all the Riches, and Grandeur, and Honours of the great Men of this World can never afford.

But a bare Profession of Religion is utterly insufficient to produce any such sacred Entertainments. 'Tis not the Name by which we are called, nor the Pretences we make, that can bring the Soul near to God; that can afford it the Sweetness that arises from his Love; or administer any of those substantial and exalted Joys, which holy Souls have often experienced, in their Approaches to God, and Converse with him. The first Fruits of the Heavenly Inheritance, Fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, are not
to

to be expected or hoped for, by any but those that are indeed travelling to the Heavenly Zion, and * *acquainting themselves in truth with God, that they may be at Peace, and that thereby Good may come unto them*: These things are † *Children's Bread, and not to be given to Dogs*: Our Lord tells us, concerning those that *did their Alms, that they might have glory of Men, or prayed, or fasted, that they might be seen of Men*, Matth. vi. 2, 5, 16. *Verily, I say unto you, they have their Reward*. But it is a Reward far different from that which awaits sincere Christians; perhaps they may have that Applause and Glory from Men, which they court; but it is the utmost they have to expect: They have no room to hope for the present sacred Entertainments of Religion, while governed by such Views, any more than the blessed Recompence of Reward at last: And what absurd Folly is it, to take up the Form of that which is capable of affording the greatest Pleasure in the World, and lose all that Pleasure, for want of attending to the Substance and Reality of it.

2. A bare Profession of Religion, can never put us in Possession of its present inestimable Privileges.

God has graciously annexed a Variety of high and valuable Privileges, to true and vital Religion; such as exalt the Happiness of the Saints at present, far above the greatest Dig-

* Job xxii. 21. † Matth. xv. 26.

nities, Possessions, and Pleasures of the World; such as will assuredly issue in their compleat and everlasting Blessedness; and such that without them we are unspeakably wretched.

The Pardon of all manner of Sins and Trespases, through the atoning Sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God, is the special Privilege of the Soul that feels the sacred Power of Religion, and walks under its prevailing Influence. *There is now no Condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*, says the Apostle, *Rom. viii. 1. who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit*: And what Tongue can express, what Heart conceive, the worth of so great a Blessing as this; to be delivered from a Load of Guilt; to be no longer obnoxious to the condemning Sentence of the broken Law, and everlasting Misery and Ruin? What an inestimable Privilege is it to be reconciled to God, to be interested in his fatherly Love, and to find Acceptance before him? How desirable a Blessing to come to God, as our own God; and receive, from time to time, gracious Answers to the Requests we offer before him; to be the Objects of the special Care of his Providence, and guarded by his Almighty Grace against all our spiritual Enemies; to be * *the Heirs of his Promises*; and intitled to all the abundant Blessings contained in them? Such Privileges, such Happiness as this, is inseparably connected with the

* Heb. vi. 17.

genuine Character of the Saints, and constitutes the present glorious Inheritance of the Sons of God.

But none of these Things belong to those, that have the Form of Godliness without the Power. To the Hypocrite it must ever be said, as it was by the Apostle *Peter* to *Simon Magus*, *Acts* viii. 21. *Thou hast neither Part nor Lot in this Matter.* Thou hast foolishly satisfied thyself with a Name and Form, an airy Dream, an empty Show of Religion; and all thy Hopes, all thy Expectations of such Blessedness as this, are a Dream too, a mere foolish groundless Imagination. The precious Blessings that are annexed to the Character of sincere Christians, are confined to them: The Wretch that only bears the Name, and puts on the outward Appearance of a Christian, is absolutely excluded from them: And Oh how egregious is the Folly, to rest satisfied with the mere Form of that, which in its Reality and Substance is productive of the highest Bliss; to be content with an Appearance of walking in the Way to Happiness, and yet miss of it for ever!

3. If we content ourselves with a bare Profession of Religion, we shall lose all our Pains in the outward Exercises of it.

A Profession of Religion can't be maintained with any tolerable Appearance, without the usual stated Practice of the Duties of it; and whatsoever a Person may call himself, or pretend

tend in some instances to be, if he lives in the common Neglect of any of the Duties which Christ has commanded, and if his Fellow-Creatures have Opportunity of observing it, he will justly forfeit his Character, and be regarded as an utter Stranger to Religion, notwithstanding the most confident Pretences. If, for Instance, a Person seems in any other respect to be religious, and yet lives without attending divine Ordinances; without observing the Sabbath, in the neglect of the Word of God, of secret, or even Family Prayer, if he is placed at the Head of a Family; such Neglect will naturally lead those about him to conclude, or at least to suspect his appearing to be religious upon some other Occasions, to be but a mere outside Show, a vain and groundless Pretence.

Since then the Practice of external Duties is necessary to the Maintenance of a Profession, it highly concerns us to see that our Profession is sincere, and that we have indeed that Principle of Religion within, which we outwardly express; since, without it, we shall lose all our Pains in the Practice of those Duties, and hear, read, pray, and converse to no more real Advantage, than if we did none of these things: And what manifest and notorious Folly is it, to continue from time to time, taking pains to no purpose, spending our Time, and bestowing our Labour, and perhaps Expence, without any real Advantage,

or indeed any real Concern about it? “ O
 “ my Soul, reflect (let each of us say), what
 “ a Wretch am I, how foolish a Part have
 “ I been acting, if I have hitherto prayed in
 “ such a manner, as not to be the better for
 “ it, if I have so often attended divine Or-
 “ dinances, and yet so unhappily rested in
 “ that outward Attendance, as to fail of the
 “ Advantage that I might have received by
 “ them : And especially if I have attended so
 “ many Sacraments in particular, those holy
 “ Institutions of a dying Saviour, and those
 “ solemn Professions of the Affection, and
 “ Duty of his Servants to him; without any
 “ real Love to Christ, without any spiritual
 “ Good obtained by them, without their
 “ standing for any thing in God’s Account,
 “ or being of any avail in the great Day of
 “ the Appearance of his Son ?

4. If we rest in a mere Profession of Religion, we shall perhaps be reproached, and suffer Injury, as Christians, without being such.

All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer Persecution *, in one degree or other; and not only all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, but sometimes also those that only profess and pretend to do so. *There’s Enmity put betwixt the Seed of the Serpent, and the Seed of the Woman* †; and this Enmity sometimes mistakes its Object, and shews itself, not only against

* 2. Tim. iii. 12.

† Gen. iii. 15.

the Seed of the Woman, but against those that only put on the Appearance of being such. They that are openly profane, may perhaps escape the Marks of this Enmity, by whatsoever Name they are called; but the Hypocrite, that puts on the Form of Religion, must expect his Share of it, with the real Christian, and stand an Object of Reproach perhaps as much as the Christian himself; and perhaps he may suffer other considerable Inconveniencies, and Persecutions of a private Nature, though we are mercifully protected from that which is publick. There have been Instances of those, who have endured hard things for the Sake of a Profession of Religion, whose Conduct afterwards has given great Reason to fear and conclude, that their Hearts were not right with God.

But what Folly is it, for a Person to be reproached, and persecuted for appearing to be, what in Reality he is not; to wear a Mask of Religion, and be mock'd or injur'd for it, while he is a Stranger to a real Principle of Religion?

5. If we satisfy ourselves with the bare Profession of Religion, we shall lie open to a great and dreadful Surprise at last.

If the Hypocrite deceives himself, as well as others, for the present, as there's great Reason to believe is frequently the Case; yet perhaps Conscience may awake in his dying Hours, and a thousand foreboding Fears

torture his expiring Moments; when he finds himself upon the Verge of an unalterable Eternity. And Oh how terrible is the Case of a Wretch, that finds he cannot live, and yet with just Cause dreads to die; that shudders and trembles at the View of the great Abyfs of Eternity before him, and yet in vain seeks to shrink back from it; when all the Help of Friend, and Medicine fails, and with it, that hope for an everlasting World with which he had, till then, amused himself, fails too! Every Hope, every pleasing Prospect, failing at once; the Hope of Life, and the Hope of Heaven dying together; all swallowed up in Horrour and Despair, just then beginning, when it is too late to be remedied. Oh how tremendous a Situation!

But supposing that his Hope continues as long as his Breath, and that either Reason should be so much disordered, or Conscience so much stupified, that the approach of Death should not rouse it; yet its Stroke certainly will: The Delusion which had been maintained so long will then be detected. But what Heart can conceive the Wildness of the Surprise, and the Greatness of the Terrour, of the ruined immortal Soul, when it opens its Eyes upon the World of Spirits, and finds itself dragged as a Prisoner to the Tribunal of unerring Judgment; when it beholds its Judge, and is convicted, and condemned before him? Then it will see its fatal Mistake:

But a mortal Conception cannot reach the immense Terrours of its Astonishment, to see itself to have hoped so long, and yet find it to be all in vain; to have flattered itself so much, and perceive it to be all a Lie. Oh, my Brethren, the most terrible Surprise that you have ever known or heard of upon Earth, is nothing in comparison with it. To awake out of a pleasing Dream, and find a Murderer's Knife at your Throat, or devouring Flames raging about you, would be a light and insignificant Trifle, if compared to the Hypocrite's Surprise at Death and Judgment.

6. If we are Professors of Religion, and yet not truly religious, there is a Day approaching which will certainly detect us.

'Tis but for a little time that the Mask of Religion can serve the Hypocrite's Turn: His borrowed Plumes must soon fall off, and shew him in all his Nakedness and Shame: His Honour among Men, and his own groundless Hope, will both be of very short Continuance, like the Splendour of the Lamps of the foolish Virgins. The present Life itself often discovers the Fallacy; 'tis difficult to maintain a Character that is but assumed; to act a Part long which is contrary to the real Temper of the Heart: And the Hypocrite will be in Danger of discovering himself sooner or later in this World. 'Tis emphatically asked, *Job xxvii. 10. Will he always call upon God?* And the same may be said with respect to the

rest of his religious Profession : Will he always maintain it ? It is scarce to be supposed that he will, or that he will do it without such apparent Contradiction to it, in the rest of his Temper and Conduct, as will shew what in Reality he is, or at least render his Character extremely doubtful and suspicious.

But supposing that he should have Art and Constancy enough, to maintain a Character tolerably consistent in the View of Men, to the End of Life ; that is the utmost Period to which the Disguise can be worn, or his own Self-flattery continue. He enters into a World, where no counterfeit can pass undiscovered ; he goes to appear before an all-discerning Judge, who has seen the inmost Secrets of his Heart, and will lay open all his hidden Guile to his everlasting Confusion : And at the great Day of general Judgment, his Hypocrisy shall be proclaimed before the whole World. At present 'tis but a small Circle of Acquaintance, from whom he can obtain the Credit of Religion ; but the Shame of his Insincerity shall be published before all the Generations of Mankind, from the beginning of Time to the End of it. His Hypocrisy shall be unspeakably more publick than his Profession ever was, and his Shame than his present Honour. It shall be proclaimed before all the Multitudes of Men and Angels assembled at the great Tribunal :
“ *Lo ! this is the Man that made not God his Trust ;*

“*Trust* * ; this, the Wretch that mocked
 “ God, and deceived Man, by a Profession
 “ foreign from the Temper of his Heart ; that
 “ borrowed the Christian Name, and made
 “ a Fair Appearance before Men, while he
 “ was wholly alienated from God, and in
 “ real Rebellion against him ; *that made clean*
 “ *the outside of the Cup and Platter, but his*
 “ *inward Part was full of Ravening and Wicked-*
 “ *ness* †”. Poor Consolation, that can be
 derived from so short-liv’d, and so limited a
 Fame, which must issue in speedy, publick,
 and everlasting Infamy ! What Pleasure could
 a Criminal derive, from being thought the
 most innocent of Mortals To-day, by those
 that had not heard the Evidence against him,
 if his Guilt in all its aggravating Circum-
 stances was to be published in open Court To-
 morrow ? Such is the Hypocrite’s Honour ;
 so vain his Pride ; so absurd his Pleasure in
 a Form of Godliness, and a Name to live ;
 and yet far more vain, more glaringly absurd
 than this. *The Triumph of the Wicked is short,*
and the Joy of the Hypocrite but for a Mo-
ment ‡.

7. If we only make a Profession of Religion, we shall certainly be excluded from Heaven at last.

The heavenly Inheritance is *the Inheritance of the Saints in Light* ||, prepared alone for them that are sanctified ; and *God has pro-*

* Ps. lii. 7. † Luke xi. 39. ‡ Job xx. 5. || Col. i. 12.
mised

mised it only to those that love him *. The Hypocrite therefore, or one that is a Stranger to so divine a Principle, has *no Part nor Lot in it* † : The outward Form and Profession of Religion affords no ground for a just and reasonable Expectation of it. The claim of Believers is founded upon the Purchase of Christ, and the Promises of God through him, and supported by such Evidence as the Word of God has described. But the Soul *that neglects so great Salvation* ‡, and bears none of the genuine Characters of *the Heirs of Promise* §, can have no Interest in it, for Names and Disguises will be of no Avail.

A bare Profession of Religion does nothing towards preparing a Man for it : It does not mortify Sin : it draws not the Affections to God ; it does not form the Soul into the Image of his Holiness, and the Temper of the Heavenly Inhabitants ; it gives him no relish for their blessed Entertainments, and therefore can in no Degree contribute to his Enjoyment of them.

And God has solemnly declared that none, but his sincere Servants, shall ever be admitted to his Kingdom, *Rev. xxi. 27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh Abomination, or maketh a Lie ; but those which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life ;* and *Heb. xii. 14.*

* *Jam. i. 12.* † *Acts viii. 21.* ‡ *Heb. ii. 2.*
§ *Heb. vi. 17.*

Follow Peace with all Men, and Holiness, without which no Man shall see the Lord. And our Lord assures us, in the strongest Terms, that it is not only certain that an unconverted Sinner shall not, but impossible that he should ever enter into the World of Glory, *John iii. 3. Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a Man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* A Profession of Religion alone, therefore, leaves the Soul as much as ever under this Incapacity of seeing, and inheriting the Kingdom of God. How great then is the Folly of resting in that, which will fatally disappoint us at last, of the great Object of our Hope, and of which we are so often and so solemnly warned that it will.

8. If we content ourselves with a bare Profession of Religion, we shall be exposed to the righteous, but tremendous Indignation of the great Bridegroom.

Amidst all the Multitudes of Mankind, that shall fall under his righteous Displeasure, for their Disregard of him, and Disobedience to him; those will especially do it, who have borne his Name, and pretended Regard and Duty to him, without having any thing of it in Reality: Their Profession will but so much the more expose them to the Terrours of his Vengeance.

They paid him but an idle Compliment in their Forms of Religion; they took his Name upon them, but did not love him; they

they mocked him with an Appearance, and thereby in effect insulted his Omniscience, as if it could not see through the Disguise, but might be imposed upon with a specious Shew. They spoke of his Authority, without submitting to it; of his Example, without imitating it; and of his Love, without being constrained and influenced by it. They pretended to be his Servants, and yet did nothing in truth for his Service; his Friends, and yet never gave one genuine Proof of Friendship. They professed to be expecting him, but lived in Forgetfulness of him, and Disobedience to him, and without any real Preparation for his Coming.

What can be supposed to kindle his Displeasure to a fiercer Flame, than such a Temper and Conduct as this? It seems to be the general Sense of Mankind, that an open Enemy scarce deserves so great a Degree of Displeasure, as a false and counterfeit Friend; and it is so reasonable a Judgment, that we may justly conclude, that the Lord of Glory will judge in the same Manner, and distinguish with his Wrath, those who have distinguished themselves by so great a Degree of Guilt: And it is remarkable that in the close of the foregoing Chapter, a Doom particularly dreadful is expressed by the Appointment of *A portion with the Hypocrites* *. O Hypocritical Professor, that art either conscious to

* Matth. xxiv. 51.

thyself of a Course of secret and allowed Guilt, or hast threatening Symptoms of Hypocrisy upon thee, does not thy Heart tremble to hear such Words from the Mouth of thy Judge before-hand ; to hear him, when he would speak the utmost Terrour, describe it by a portion with Hypocrites ? Surely thou must have no Fear of his Wrath, or thy Conscience must be insensible beyond Expression, if thou dost not shudder at the Apprehension of having this appointed for thy Portion.

9. A bare Profession of Religion will expose us to so much the greater Contempt, when its Insincerity is finally discovered.

'Tis evident at present, that a Pretence to Religion, where there is not a correspondent Conversation, does but expose a Person to greater Contempt, than if he made no such Pretence at all. The People of God cannot esteem him, because they see no sufficient Evidence that he is such ; and profane Sinners will make him the Object of their distinguished Scorn, regarding him but as just such a one as themselves, yet desirous to be thought quite different : And if he wholly casts off his Profession, as is frequently the Case in the Issue, yet he scarce thereby wipes away, or ever wears out, the Reproach he has contracted among his Fellow Sinners, by his former religious Pretences, but must expect to hear, from time to time, of what he once seemed to be.

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If Sinners then carry with them into the World to come, the same Dispositions they had upon Earth, as there's the utmost ground to believe that they do ; we may reasonably suppose a Hypocrite to be a distinguished Mark for the Scorn of Hell, and there to be reminded with eternal Taunts of what he once professed : “ This was a pretended Saint : “ He heard, he read, he prayed, he talked “ of Religion, he attended the Lord's Supper, “ he imposed upon Mankind with his hypocritical Pretences, while in Reality he was “ as bad as the worst.”

O insincere Professor, canst thou relish, canst thou bear the Thought of such eternal Mockery ? If not, tremble to think of having *a Name to live, and yet being in Reality dead* *. But if thou still retest in the bare Name, and external Character of a Christian, thy Shame shall not be confined to the Regions of Darkness, wide and extensive as they are ; divine Justice is interested to lay it open before Men and Angels, to vindicate its own Conduct in condemning thee : And what canst thou expect when thy Hypocrisy is thus laid open, but universal, extreme, and everlasting Contempt.

Such as has been represented in these several Particulars, is the dreadful Folly of resting in a bare Profession of Religion, without a Regard to its inward vital Power ; from which

* Rev. iii. 1.

we may naturally infer such things as these : The Greatness of the Corruption of human Nature --- the Deceitfulness of Sin, and Subtlety of Satan --- and the great Need we have to watch, and pray against resting in a mere outward Profession.

1. From the Folly of resting in a Profession of Religion, we may infer, the Greatness of the Corruption of human Nature.

The great and general Prevalency of Evil among Mankind, affords a striking Evidence of it, and such as can never be invalidated, whatever Attempts are made for that Purpose : But we have a further sad Evidence of it, in that so many who make a Profession of Religion, content themselves with the bare Appearance of it. That their Number is indeed great, is intimated by the great Proportion, which the Foolish Virgins bore to the whole Number that took their Lamps, and went forth to expect, and attend the Bridegroom ; and our Lord assures us of it, when he says, *Matt. vii. 22, 23. Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name have cast out Devils, and in thy Name have done many wonderful Works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.*

What then must be the Depravity of our Natures, when not only so great a Part of Mankind make scarce any Pretence to Religion ;

ligion, but when among those that do, there are so great a Number that only pretend to it; that are so far convinced of its Excellence, as to put on the Form of it, and yet so averse to it, as to satisfy themselves with this, in the Face of so many dreadful Consequences of doing it!

Their Profession leads them to a speculative Acquaintance with Religion, and may probably introduce them, while it is maintained with any tolerable Consistency, to the Friendship of Persons really religious, in whom they may see its Excellence exemplified in the Effect it has upon their Temper and Conduct, in the Serenity and Peace of Mind it inspires, and in the pleasing Hopes and Expectations it teaches. From them they must probably often hear solemn Representations of the Insufficiency of a Profession alone, and the extreme Danger of resting in it. To do so then, notwithstanding all these Advantages, must argue a Carelessness about eternal Happiness or Misery, never to be enough dreaded, and an Averseness to the Power of Godliness astonishingly obstinate, and consequently must prove the Greatness of that Corruption of Nature from which it springs.

2. We may further infer the Deceitfulness of Sin, and the Subtilty of Satan.

This fatal Enemy of the Soul, Sin, not only cheats profane Sinners with the Hopes of Im-

punity, notwithstanding all their flagrant Abominations, but in a Manner equally, if not yet more amazing, cheats with a Form of Godliness, many that are restrained either by worldly Views, or by the Remonstrances of an enlightened Conscience, from Acts of notorious Sin; and by that Form of Religion, Conscience is made for the present easy, and yet the Soul ruined at last. By what astonishing Artifices can the Sorcerers, Sin, and Satan the great Deceiver, so blind the Minds, so much silence the Consciences of those who are often hearing, perhaps often speaking, of the Majesty of Heaven, as an all-seeing and heart-searching God, as a God of spotless Purity, and irreconcilable Hatred to Sin, and an unerring and decisive Judge? O ye reasonable Faculties, how are ye lull'd asleep! Conscience, Self-love, Dread of Misery, and Desire of Happiness, how are ye stupified and infatuated, to suffer Men to content themselves with Dreams of Safety and Peace hereafter, while they are regardless of the essential Way of securing them.

3. We may infer, with undeniable Evidence, from what has been offered, the great Need we have of Watchfulness and Prayer, against the Folly of resting in a mere outward Profession.

Oh how many solemn Engagements demand the utmost Dread of it, and great Watchfulness against it! Let us remember,

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besides

besides the Considerations that have been mentioned, the endearing Engagements which the Love of Christ lays us under, to love him with all our Hearts, and to serve him with all possible Diligence. He came from the Courts of Light, from all the Majesty he possessed there, not to make us Christians in Name, but such in Sincerity and Truth, and to *purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works* *. He died in inexpressible Ignominy and Anguish, to *make ready a People for the Lord* †, and to bind us to his Service by everlasting Bonds. We disregard therefore the great End of all his Grace, if we satisfy ourselves with any thing less than a cordial Surrender of our whole Souls to him.

Let us remember his all-seeing Eye: He cannot be deceived with the most specious Forms; *all things are naked, and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do* ‡. He knows our inmost Disposition towards him, and judges of it, not by what we appear to Men, but by what he himself discerns us to be.

Let us remember the Account we are shortly to give before him; how solemn, how exact, how decisive! and let a holy Awe of that Scene possess our Hearts. Let us seek a warm Love to such a Benefactor, that has done, and prepares to do such great things for

* Tit. ii. 14.

† Luke i. 17.

‡ Heb. iv. 13.

his faithful Servants. This will be a blessed Preservative against the Folly of hypocritical Professors: This will be a genuine and infallible Evidence, of our Part in all the eternal Blessings of his Kingdom. And, while we use these important Methods, to fortify and guard our Minds against the pernicious Folly of the Hypocrite, let us earnestly cry to him who has a perfect Acquaintance with us, and a sovereign Power over our Hearts, that he would *shew us if there is any wicked Way in us, and lead us in the Way everlasting* *.

* Psalm cxxxix. 24.

S E R M O N IV.

The Excellence of a Principle of
S A V I N G G R A C E.

M A T T H. XXV. 4.

*But the Wise took Oil in their Vessels with
their Lamps.*

'T IS melancholy to reflect, how little the Worth of real Religion is understood and believed in the World, and even in a Land favoured with the glorious Light of the Gospel of Christ. The Word of God, both in its general Tenor, and upon many particular Occasions, represents its Value in a Light highly adapted to awaken universal Attention to it, and Concern about it. It assures us *that the Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour*, Prov. xii. 26. *That Wisdom's Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths, Peace: That she is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her*, Prov. iii. 17, 18. *That it shall be well with them that fear God,*
which

which fear before him, Eccl. viii. 12. And that Godliness is profitable unto all things, having Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come. 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Yet notwithstanding these, and many other solemn Declarations of the Word of God, 'tis deplorably manifest, from the prevailing Temper and Conduct of a great Part of Mankind, that they have no Regard to that which *the Scriptures of Truth* * so strongly recommend; and that there is nothing about which they give themselves less Concern than Religion: And there is great Reason to fear, both from the Accounts given us in the Sacred Oracles, and from the visible Inconsistency there is betwixt the Profession, and the Behaviour of many that make some Pretences to Religion, that they satisfy themselves with a *Form of Godliness*, while they *deny the Power thereof* †.

But the prevailing Disposition of Mankind, shall not make void the Words of eternal Truth; and it will certainly be found in the Issue, that there is an Excellence in Religion, which renders it a Point of the highest Wisdom, to attend to it in Preference to every other Object; that *the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom, and a good Understanding have all they that do his Commandments* ‡; that Wisdom and Folly are not to be judged of, as the World in general

* Dan. x. 21. † 2 Tim. iii. 5. ‡ Psal. cxi. 10.

judges, by the natural Abilities of Men, or the Use they make of them for *this* World, but by their Regards to *another*; and that the meanest, and most illiterate Christians, and Persons of the weakest Understandings, with respect to the Affairs of this Life, who are yet supremely concerned about experiencing a Work of Grace within, and getting sure Evidence for Heaven, are upon the whole, much wiser than the greatest Philosophers or Politicians upon Earth, who are regardless of these great Concerns.

Having then, in considering a former Part of this solemn Parable of our Lord's, pointed out the Wisdom of sincere Christians, and the Folly of hypocritical Professors; as both these are Themes of so interesting a Nature that they appeared to demand further Attention; I have, in the foregoing Discourse, considered that particular Instance of the Folly of the foolish Virgins, their taking their Lamps, but taking no Oil with them; or, the inexpressible Folly of resting in a bare Profession of Religion, without an inward Principle of Grace, which appears to be the natural, and obvious Intent of our Lord in that Representation; this was particularly shewn in such Observations as these: That by resting in a bare Profession of Religion, we shall lose all the Pleasures which are to be found in real Religion; that we shall miss of all its present inestimable Privileges;
that

that we shall lose all our Pains in the outward Exercises of it ; that we shall perhaps be reproached and suffer Indignities as Christians, without being such ; that we shall lie open to a great and dreadful Surprise at last ; that there is a Day coming which will certainly detect us ; that we shall be excluded from Heaven, incur the righteous and tremendous Indignation of the great Bridegroom, and be finally exposed to the greatest Contempt. Oh may the God of all Grace impress these weighty Considerations on each of our Hearts, in such a manner, as may effectually warn us to shun the fatal, and destructive Folly of contenting ourselves with a bare Profession of Religion, without an inward Principle of saving Grace.

The Words, now before us, represent to us that particular Instance of the Wisdom of the Wise Virgins, that they took Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps ; or, the Wisdom of sincere Christians, in not resting in an outward Profession ; but being supremely concerned to see, that they have experienced a Work of saving Grace on their Hearts. This I shall particularly shew, by considering the Excellence of true Grace, in a Variety of Instances, in which I shall keep in View the Metaphor which our Lord here uses, yet, at the same time, avoid straining it beyond what, I apprehend, it will naturally bear.

But it is highly needful to observe, that to produce the blessed, and important Effects of true Grace, which are to be mentioned, there must not only be a secret Principle of it in the Heart, but a Concern to maintain the continued Exercises of it, and live under the Influence of it. If the Wise Virgins had not used the Oil, which they took in their Vessels, how little would it have profited them to have it? But when their Wisdom is commended in taking it, it is manifestly implied that they used it, to supply their Lamps, and maintain their Splendour. In like manner, a Principle of saving Grace in the Heart, if not kept in due Activity, will greatly fail of producing the blessed Effects, which in its own Nature it is adapted to produce: And herein consists the great Difference, that is often easy to be observed betwixt some Christians and others: Some, by a lively Exercise of Grace, enjoy much Nearness to God; and are great Blessings to those around them; while others, by their Negligence, fail of a great Part of the Honour, Comfort, and Usefulness, which might be expected; and for want of living more under the Influence of Faith and Love, their Lamps sometimes seem going out, like those of the Foolish Virgins. This the Apostle represents in strong Terms, when he speaks of some, as building upon the Foundation Christ Jesus, *Gold, Silver, and precious Stones*; a truly valuable and glorious

glorious Structure, becoming the Foundation on which it is erected; but others a poor, mean, dishonourable Structure, resembling *Wood, Hay, and Stubble*, 1 Cor. iii. 12. And he warns us in the following Verse, that *every Man's Work shall be made manifest; for the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by Fire, and the Fire shall try every Man's Work, of what Sort it is.* May all that are indeed building upon this glorious Foundation, ever maintain an impressive Sense of this solemn Admonition; as much of their own Comfort, and much of the Honour, God expects from them, depends upon maintaining Grace in its due Exercise.

Carrying then this Remark with us, I observe, that true Grace tends to make our *Profession* fair and bright ---- to revive the Exercises and Glory of it, if they begin to languish --- to render us useful to others --- to afford Light in Darkness to ourselves ---- and to be of important Use in Time of Need. ---- Its Advantage and Excellence will be durable --- it will be pleasing in the Eyes of the great Bridegroom --- and it will do us Honour, before Men and Angels at last.

I. True Grace tends to make our Profession of Religion fair and bright.

By true Grace, I intend a prevailing and abiding Disposition, and Bent of the Mind, to love and obey the blessed God in all things, wrought in the Soul by his special
Grace

Grace and Favour, and by the Agency of his Holy Spirit. And it is evident, that there is a great Advantage in it, as it adds an Excellence and Glory to a Profession of Religion, above those mean and unworthy Principles from which a bare Profession may spring, and by which it may be for a Time maintained.

As in the common Affairs of Life, those things are likely to be done best, which are most agreeable to our Choice and Inclination; and it is generally easy to observe a great Difference betwixt the *Manner* in which the very same things are done, by Persons who make them their Choice and Delight, and those who do them with Reluctance, and contrary to the Bent of their Inclinations; so also, there is a great, and commonly a very observable Difference betwixt the bare Practice of a Variety of external Duties, and having the Heart well engaged in them. By the former indeed, such a Profession of Religion may be maintained, as perhaps none can prove to be false and insincere; and perhaps many may be ready to hope well concerning those in whom they see it: But how far is such a Character in general, from commanding the Esteem and Respect of those about us, and how little does it adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour?

But



But it is the Nature and Tendency of true Grace, to render the Temper and Character of a Christian consistent with itself, in the several Parts of it; to keep him upon his Guard against any thing unworthy of it; to make him zealous, active, and exemplary; and thereby add such a Glory to his Profession, as Hypocrites can scarce imitate, or, at least, continue to imitate. How few can doubt the Sincerity of such a Christian? and what a general Testimony does his Conversation leave upon every Conscience in his Behalf? Thus we read, concerning Demetrius, 3 Ep. of John 12. *Demetrius hath good Report of all Men, and of the Truth itself; yea, and we also bear Record, and ye know that our Record is true. q. d. Ye know it, not only in consequence of our being God's inspired Messengers, but from what you see of the Excellence of that Servant of Christ, and the general Esteem it has procured him.* If any are so malignant, as to seek to blast the Character of such a Christian, 'tis generally to their own Confusion: *God brings forth his Righteousness as the Light, and his Judgment as the Noon-day,* to refer to *Psal. xxxvii. 6.* Many Sinners themselves are often found ready to vindicate him, and the Reproach recoils upon the Authors of it.

Such is the Nature of true Grace; and it is greatly to be lamented, that, through
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the Remainder of Corruption, it should ever fail of producing such an Effect. O that that divine Direction was upon all Occasions well regarded, by all the Servants of Christ, 1 Pet. iii. 16. *Having a good Conscience, that whereas they speak Evil of you as Evil Doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good Conversation in Christ:* Then would they indeed well maintain the Character of Wife Virgins.

2. An inward Principle of saving Grace, tends to revive the Exercises and Glory of a Profession, when they begin to languish.

Such is the Imperfection of the present State, that scarce the most eminent and exemplary Christian, maintains upon all Occasions, that happy, uniform Watchfulness, and Zeal in the Service of Christ, which, so far as it is maintained, does great Honour to the Christian Character: Grace itself loses something of its due Exercise, and fails to produce its full and blessed Effects: And there are unhappy Seasons, in which the Marks of remaining Imperfection are sufficiently evident, even in those that have made the greatest Attainments in the divine Life; and especially so in the Generality of Christians. The Saints above are raised superior to every thing of this Nature, and glow with perpetual, and unremitting Ardour in their Lord's Service: But while this mortal State continues, the remaining Imperfection

of the Saints sometimes damps their zeal and Diligence, abates their Watchfulness, and renders the Exercises of their sacred Profession less abundant, or less spiritual.

But in such an unhappy Case, there is an Excellence in a Principle of Grace within, far above any thing in a mere Form of Religion. The Hypocrite, when he begins to relax in the Zeal which he shewed, when he entered on his Profession, generally grows more and more loose, drops one Duty after another, and runs from Sin to Sin: The Motives, which engaged him to take up an Appearance of Religion, cease, or give Way to the Power of his beloved Lusts; and the Profession they produced, either wholly, or in a great Measure, cease with them. He destroys by Degrees, the Hopes, which those who were disposed to think most favourably of him, retained as long as possible; and in many Instances, he becomes at last, an open, and an hardened Sinner.

But the blessed Principle of Love, to an unseen God and Saviour, that there is in a real Christian; the Sense he has of the Excellence, and Obligation of walking with God, of the evil and pernicious Nature of Sin, and of the Solemnity of eternal Things; and the Experience he has had of the Sweetness of God's fatherly Smiles, powerfully tend to revive the Exercises of Religion, to rouse him to fresh Activity in the Service
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of Christ, and renewed Fear of offending, and dishonouring him; to give him an Alarm when the Tokens of God's gracious Presence are withdrawn, and to engage him to enquire into the Cause of it, and seek the Removal of it; to mourn after the Lord, till he renews the Visits of his Love, and determines in his Approaches to him, *I will not let thee go except thou blest me* *. And when a Soul comes to God with such a Disposition, it shall find that he is indeed a *Rewarder of those that diligently seek him* †; and that *he is nigh to all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth* ‖. The many ardent Prayers that the sincere Christian has lodged in Heaven for preserving, quickening, and restoring Grace, bring down a merciful answer, and the blessed Habit which he has begun to contract, of seeking God, studying to please him, and dreading to offend him, revives by renewed Influences from above; produces new Acts of Duty and Obedience, and causes the Lamp which begun to grow faint, to recover its Lustre. And oh! how important is it, earnestly to seek a Principle within, adapted to produce so happy an Effect; and to watch, and labour, and pray, that it may ever afford such blessed Fruits in us.

3. A Principle of Grace within, fits us to be useful to others.

* Gen. xxxii. 26. † Heb. xi. 6. ‖ Psal. cxlv. 18.

To this we are commanded by our Lord, to have a particular Regard: *Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. Matt. v. 16.* not with a hypocritical View, to the Honour that is from Men, but for the Glory of your Father which is in Heaven; that you may engage many to esteem Religion, and excite them to imitate your Example. And to the same Purpose the Apostle says, *Phil. ii. 16. Holding forth the Word of Life.*

But a sacred Principle of Religion, prevailing in the Heart, is highly needful to fit us for so important a Duty. Where can it be expected to be exemplified in the Conversation, but where it reigns in the Soul? And what else can generally be learnt from bare Professors of Religion, but strange Inconsistency; hardening to Sinners, discouraging to weak Believers, that had maintained a favourable Opinion of them, and perhaps emboldening them to venture upon things displeasing to God, and injurious to themselves? Or, supposing that some things should for a Time appear, even in the Hypocrite, worthy of Imitation; yet his Inconsistency, and that fatal Apostasy in which his Profession generally ends, has the strongest Tendency to destroy all the Effects of it; to make Sinners about him more easy, in a total Neglect of Religion; to confirm the

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openly Profane, in the false, and most destructive Imagination, which they sometimes avow, *viz.* that all the Professors of Religion are alike hypocritical.

But the Grace of God, in the Souls of his Servants, as far as it produces its own genuine Effects, proves the contrary, and demonstrates, to the Confusion of Sinners, that Religion is more than a Name; that it is a glorious, an influential, and powerful Reality; and the highest Honour and Happiness of reasonable Creatures, and indeed practicable by Men of like Passions, and exposed to like Snares and Temptations with others. The Temper and Conduct of the Saints, on a Variety of Occasions, may shew those about them, what they themselves ought to be; and, if they will not learn their Duty from the Word of God, they may learn it from living Examples, and will be so much the more inexcusable, if they do not.

Grace reigning in the Saints, is not only adapted to give Light to Sinners, to convince and shame them, and excite them to seek to experience it in themselves, and imitate the Temper and Character of the Saints; but it tends also to stir up other Christians to Emulation, to shew them what is faulty or defective in themselves, and to quicken and animate them to greater Watchfulness, and growing Zeal and Ardour in
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their Christian Course. A Christian, even by his Example, is a *wise Reprover upon an obedient Ear* *; and those that are wise themselves, will in many Instances increase in Wisdom, by observing the Wisdom, Watchfulness, and Excellence of others. How truly valuable, then, is a Principle of Religion prevailing in the Soul, which is thus admirably fitted to make us Blessings to all about us.

4. A genuine Principle of Religion in the Soul, is adapted to afford Light in Darkness.

Even sincere Christians may have their Seasons of great Discouragement, and Temptation; and indeed, such Seasons are almost peculiar to them. The profane Sinner is too much hardened, to concern himself about an Interest in the Favour of God, or enter into any Inquiry concerning the State of his Soul, or too fatally blinded to imagine himself to be in any Danger: the Hypocrite generally finds Means to keep his Conscience quiet, by his external Performances, and the high Opinion he has of them. We seldom, therefore, hear any Complaints from Persons of such Characters, of the Hardness of their Hearts, of the Temptations of Satan, and of their Fears of falling short of Heaven; or, if at any Time they speak in this Manner, 'tis only Language which they

* Prov. xxv. 12.

have learnt from others; and which they use without any answerable, or at least permanent Impressions. But sincere Christians see so much of the Holiness of the Law of God, such Sinfulness in their own Hearts, such Proneness to entertain too high Thoughts of themselves; they see so much of the Fallacies of Satan, and have such awful Apprehensions of the tremendous Consequence of being mistaken at last, that they are often ready to indulge the most discouraging Fears; and, as there is yet much Sin remaining within, there is no Reason to wonder, that Souls, intent upon the Pursuit of eternal Salvation, find enough in themselves to found their Doubts upon; nor is it surprising, that God should sometimes see fit to hide his Face, and suffer them to walk in Darkness. The Word of God plainly supposes, that this would be no unusual Case, *Isa. l. 10. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the Voice of his Servant, that walketh in Darkness, and hath no Light? let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* And the Psalmist observes, *Psal. xxx. 7. Thou didst hide thy Face, and I was troubled.* This Conduct, of the blessed God, is indeed painful to his Servants, but it is wise and salutary; as, in many Instances, it manifestly leads them to dread Sin the more, preserves and increases the Tenderneſs of their Conſciences, and quickens them to give so much
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the greater *Diligence, to make their Calling and Election sure* *.

But in this dark, and discouraging Case, the blessed Principle of a divine Life within, is a Foundation laid for returning Hope and Comfort. If the Consciences of Sinners are at any Time startled, there's nothing yet wrought in them, that can reasonably afford any chearing Reflections; but the sincere Christian may look back upon Seasons of holy Desire after God, and Love to him, of Concern to please him, and Watchfulness against Sin: he may look back upon some Victories gained over Corruption, and Temptation, upon the Power he has experienced in the Word of God, and the Sweetness he has tasted in the Promises: and though such Experiences as these, should not prevail to take away all Doubt; yet they have a blessed Tendency to soften and relieve it, and prevent its becoming so grievous as it might justly otherwise do. Or, if the Wisdom of God should see fit, to suffer his Servants to walk much in Darkeness, and permit Satan to cloud the Evidence of their Interest in him; yet it is but for a little Time: *Light is sown for the Righteous, and Gladness for the upright in Heart, Psal. xcvi. 11.* and it shall certainly spring up into a glorious Harvest, in due Season. *They that sow in Tears shall reap in Joy. He that goeth*

* 2 Pet. i. 10.

forth and weepeth, bearing precious Seed, shall doubtless come again with Rejoicing, bringing his Sheaves with him. Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6.

5. A Principle of Grace is adapted to be of important Use in Time of Need.

Several Seasons in the Christian Life are especially so. A Time of Affliction is a Time of Need; when God lays his Hand upon us, or our Comforts, our Spirits naturally droop, and we need something to support, and refresh us. To have then *the Testimony of Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, we have had our Conversation in the World**; to be able to reflect upon a conscientious Care to please God, and upon gracious Communications from him, will have a blessed Tendency, to administer a Cordial to the Mind, under such painful Dispensations, to ease its Burdens, and dissipate its Gloom.

A Time of great Temptation of any Kind, is a Time of Need; when Satan particularly rages, and assaults and worries us with more than usual Violence; a Principle of Grace will be, in such a Case, as it were an inward Monitor, to remind us to flee to the Throne of Grace for Deliverance, to look to Christ, the Conqueror of Satan, and the *Captain of our Salvation †*, to have Recourse to the Promises of God, and to raise our Views to that blessed World where Satan

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Heb. ii. 10.

never comes. It is therefore of important Use in so distressing a Season, by exciting us to seek Relief from its proper Source, though it is too imperfect to give it of itself.

In the Approaches of Death, what can furnish such Pleasure, such delightful Hope, with respect to the solemn Scenes opening upon us, as an Experience of sanctifying Grace? a Principle of sincere Love to Christ, and Concern to serve him, and some blessed Intercourse maintained with him? What a glorious Antidote do such things as these naturally afford against the Fear of Death! and indeed, without this, nothing can afford any Antidote at all against it, when the Solemnity of the Change then to be made, is well understood and considered.

There must indeed be *the Witness of the Spirit of God, that we are the Children of God*, to enable us clearly to perceive, and keep in view the Evidence of it; but this Witness is founded upon Reality, and not Imagination; upon Truth, and not upon Falshood and Delusion; it is a Witness that concurs with that of *our Spirits**, and not such as Conscience must contradict, as is sometimes the Case with respect to the Testimony, which the too favourable Sentiments of our Fellow-Creatures may lead them to bear for us: and if the Witness of the Spirit of God attends the Witness of our

* Rom. viii. 16.

Spirits, as we have Encouragement to hope that it will, if we are indeed Saints, we may support Afflictions, bear up under Temptations, and face Death itself without Fear or Discomposure.

6. True Grace is of a durable Nature.

It is so in itself, when it is once wrought in the Soul : it is, according to the Account before given of it, an abiding Disposition, and Bent of the Mind, not the precarious Effect of some present Alarm or Impression ; but a fixed determined Choice of the Service of Christ, for the Business and Entertainment of Life : it is *the Seed of God remaining* * *in the Soul*, as a blessed Preservative against relapsing into a renewed Course of Sin : and the same gracious Power which implanted it there, and taught the Christian to be solicitous for the Maintenance of it, is engaged for its Preservation. The Saints *are kept by the Power of God through Faith unto Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last Time.* 1 Pet. i. 5. And the Lord Jesus has declared concerning his Sheep, *John x. 28. I give unto them eternal Life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hands.* And the proper and continued Exercise of this blessed Principle, confirms and strengthens it, and fits it more

* 1 John iii. 9.

and more to bear the Shock of Temptation, and stand firm in a Day of Trial.

It endures therefore, through the various Relations, Circumstances, and Changes of Life; through a Variety of Temptations, and Afflictions; through the Snares attending Youth, if it was then implanted in the Soul; through the Trials of riper Age, and the Infirmities of advanced Years; and it is its peculiar Excellence and Glory, that it will endure for ever, and be perfected in that blissful, and unchanging State, to which a Believer shall be admitted.

7. True Grace will be pleasing in the Eyes of the great Bridegroom.

The extinguished Lamps of the foolish Virgins, could by no means be so. A mere outward Profession, unsupported by a Principle of sincere Love to him, cannot be pleasing to him at present, because he sees through the Fallacy; and therefore certainly cannot be so when it expires in its own Emptiness and Shame, before every other Eye, as well as his. But true Grace, as it is the Purchase of his Blood, his own Work, and his own Image instamped upon the Soul, and maintained by his own Influence, is highly acceptable and pleasing in his Sight; for *he loveth Righteousness, and hateth Iniquity**: 'tis pleasing to him to observe its several Exercises, to see his Saints

* 2 Heb. i. 9.

looking to him, longing after him, and walking as in his Sight, and under the constraining Influence of his Love.

He beholds it with Pleasure now, in its imperfect State, but will especially do so, when it shall burn forth with a bright and fervent Flame, to languish and decay no more; and he will take the most gracious Notice of it, to the everlasting Joy and Blessedness of his Servants. Once more,

8. True Grace will do us Honour before Men and Angels at last.

It would redound to the Shame of the foolish Virgins, to have their Lamps gone out, when the Use of them was called for; and to withdraw, when their Attendance was become especially seasonable; and on the other Hand, it would redound to the Honour of the wise Virgins, before all that attended the Marriage, that they had made due Provision to wait upon the Bridegroom; that they were ready at his Call, and their Lamps shining bright, when they were summoned to attend him.

In like manner, while the utmost Shame awaits insincere Professors, it will be the inexpressible Honour of sincere Christians, before Men and Angels, that *their Hearts were right with God**; that they were solicitous

* Psal. lxxviii. 37.

to walk with him *; to live by Faith †, and in the Exercise of Love, and Duty to an unseen Saviour. *The Spirits of just Men made perfect* gone before to Glory, and *the innumerable Company of Angels* ‡ will receive them as their Brethren and everlasting Companions, with the utmost Pleasure and Delight; and Christ himself will put the highest Honour upon them at his Coming, and *confess them before his Father* || and the holy Angels, as those that have loved him in Truth; but he will especially confess, with distinguished Honour, those that have loved him much.

Such Things as these, shew the Excellence of true Grace, especially when well maintained. Some Improvement of what has been said, must conclude the present Discourse: Let us then reflect,

I. What a blessed Work is the Work of Regeneration! and how highly are they indebted to the Grace of God, that have experienced it!

It is that blessed Work of the Holy Spirit; He it is, who implants so beneficial a Principle in the Soul, to which it was naturally a Stranger; who brings it out of a State in which it was incapable of any of those special Advantages, into a State in which it becomes a Partaker of all of them, in Pro-

* Gen. v. 24.

† Rom. i. 17.

‡ Matt. x. 32.

|| Heb. xii. 22, 23.

portion to the Degree in which the Exercise of Grace is maintained. Blessed and most important Change, which delivers us from the Folly, the Shame, and the Doom of the foolish Virgins; and introduces us to the Privileges and Honour of the wise! Could the God of Heaven confer a greater Blessing upon us? Time knows none comparable to it, and Eternity shall afford one continued Display of its Excellence. It introduces us into the Family of God at present, and shall shortly place us for ever in his immediate Presence. Let the adopted and regenerated Children of his Grace, shout the everlasting Honours of that Mercy they have experienced; and acknowledge, with perpetual Gratitude, that *the Lines are fallen to them in a pleasant Place, and that they have a truly goodly Heritage* *, whatsoever the Dispensations of Providence towards them in other respects may be.

2. If we fail of any of these Advantages, how much does it concern us to inquire into the Cause of it.

It is the Nature of true Grace to produce such blessed Effects as have been mentioned, and the careful and watchful Exercise of it, will scarce fail of doing it. If therefore we are destitute of any of them, we have great Reason to conclude, that it is, if not for

* Psal. xvi. 6.

Want of true Grace, yet for Want of the due Exercise of it. If our Lamps do not shine fair and bright, we have Need seriously to inquire, whether we have indeed the Oil of heavenly Grace to feed them; and, if we have Reason to hope that we have, yet it concerns us to inquire, in what State this blessed Principle is, in our Souls. Are our Consciences tender, and our Hearts spiritual? Do we attend much to the Temper of our Minds? and is our Conversation circumspect? Or, are we, on the contrary, often deplorably off our Guard, frequently turning aside from God, but little communing with our own Hearts, and but little considering and examining our Ways? Are we often renewing our Repentance for our Wanderings from God? or, on the contrary, are our Minds strangely insensible, and regardless upon such Occasions? Are we often solemnly renewing our believing Applications to the Blood of Sprinkling, for the Purging of our Consciences from every Degree of Guilt? or, do we gradually wear off a Sense of Sin, without any solemn Acts of Faith, and Repentance? Do we wait much upon God at the Footstool of his Throne, and wrestle earnestly with him there? or is Duty, either sometimes neglected, or cold, careless, and formal, when it is performed? Is there a continued Inter-
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course kept up with God and Heaven? or do we live in a Manner like Strangers to both? A serious Inquiry into such Things as these, will have a blessed Tendency, to discover what it is that deprives us of any of these Advantages, which true Grace is adapted to produce.

3. What a powerful Engagement should these things be, earnestly to seek to live in the continued lively Exercise of Grace.

Let us not rest satisfied with the Hope, and Persuasion of our Relation to Christ, and Interest in him, even supposing the Ground of that Hope and Persuasion to be good. The great Advantage that will arise from loving him much, and from living much, as in his Sight, and in constant Expectation of his Coming, ought to be a powerful Motive to seek earnestly after it. How desirable an Object must it be to us, if indeed we love him, to bring much Glory to his Name, by a truly honourable Profession! How desirable, if we have any thing of the Spirit, and Temper of Christ, to do the most important Good to those around us! and how desirable a Blessing, on our own Account, to reap all the precious Fruits, which the blessed Principle of Saving Grace is adapted to produce! and it is evident, that the more it prevails in the Soul, the more abundant Encouragement there is to hope, that

Principle of Saving Grace.

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none of them shall fail. Seek then, my Brethren, its Growth and Strength, as a Blessing unspeakably valuable, and durable; and may the Holy Spirit ever teach us to abound in the Exercise of it, and afford us perpetual Cause to rejoice in its glorious Effects.

S E R.

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S E R M O N V.

The Bridegroom tarrying, and the
foolish Virgins sleeping.

M A T T H. XXV. 5.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

HA V I N G gone through the former Parts of this awakening Parable, in several preceding Discourses; these Words present us with an awful Charge, in which both the wise and foolish Virgins were involved. The wise had happily avoided that great Instance of the Folly of the foolish, in taking no Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps; but alas! even they were, in this respect, unhappily Partakers of the Folly, and Guilt of the foolish, that they also slumbered, and slept. They were indeed provided against such a Surprise, as would
exclude

exclude them from the Marriage ; yet still it may justly appear strange, that the sincere Friends of the Bridegroom should so much forget their Friendship to him, the Design on which they came out, and the Expectation before them, as to slumber and sleep : Who would have thought of such Folly in the wise Virgins, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not told us, that it would be so, and did we not see a Thousand lamentable Proofs of it around us, in those who, we have Reason to believe, are numbered among them ? Lord, what is Man, what a foolish, sinful, unguarded Creature ? and even the Saints themselves, how imperfectly is their native Folly cured, and in how many sad Instances, does the unhappy Influence of the Body of Sin and Death, which they bear about with them, discover itself ?

But the Folly of the foolish Virgins, herein appears extreme, that they slept while they were utterly unprepared, for the very Purpose, for which they came forth ; and in Danger of being entirely disappointed of the End, which they professed to have in View. No Thought of their Want of Preparation, of the Surprise to which they were liable, and of the Danger they were in, of being excluded from the Marriage-Supper, disturbed their Repose : they yielded themselves to it, with as much Composure, as if they had been prepared, in the most perfect Manner,

ner, and were absolutely certain, that no Danger could attend it.

To apply this to ourselves; does not the Charge, which our Lord here advances, lie, in one Degree or another, against every one of us? We profess to expect the Coming of the Bridegroom; the Day is approaching; we see, we know that it is; but where is that watchful Expectation of it, that ardent Preparation for it, which so great, so interesting an Event demands? Alas! how many are fast asleep, upon the Brink of Ruin, and ready to fall into it! and where is the Christian himself, wakeful in any Proportion, to the Importance of the Expectation of the Coming of the Son of God? Does not his Forbearance, and his Grace itself lull us asleep, instead of exciting us to a diligent Improvement of it, and to that Gratitude and active Obedience it demands? And, in particular, have not our Peace and Safety, while the Horrors of War have been raging so dreadfully abroad, been abused for so unworthy a Purpose? I would take, with Shame and Humiliation, my own Part in the Charge; and I intreat every one of you, seriously to consider, how far it is in Force against you: and oh, may the quickening Spirit of Christ Jesus our Lord descend this Day upon us, to awaken sleeping Sinners from their fatal Lethargy, and the

the Saints themselves from their unworthy Slumbers.

In considering these Words, we may observe,

I. The Tarrying or Delay of the blessed Bridegroom.

II. The Sleep of the foolish Virgins: And,

III. That of the wise Virgins themselves. Let us observe,

I. The Tarrying or Delay of the blessed Bridegroom.

He will indeed come; the astonished Earth shall behold his Glory, and all the Inhabitants of Heaven adore its pompous Display. This is the solemn Consideration, by which the Apostle attempts to awaken us, to a Sense of the Curse, that awaits them that love not the Lord Jesus Christ; 1 Cor. xvi. 22. *Maran-atha*; the Lord will come. He has given us repeated and most solemn Assurances of it, and sooner *shall Heaven and Earth pass away, than one Word* * which he has spoken.

* Matt. xxiv. 35.

His Coming indeed is near: we wait not many hundred Years, like the Patriarchs before the Flood, for his coming to each of us by Death; *the Judge in Effect stands at the Door* *; but yet a short Delay there is, like the few Hours of the Night, betwixt the Time when the ten Virgins took and lighted their Lamps, and Midnight, when the Cry was made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh. The Delay of our Lord's coming to the general Judgment, has been indeed longer, and probably may yet be so; but even this great Event was spoken of by the Apostles, as near in their Days; and was so, in Comparison with the Duration of that eternal State, to which it will consign all Mankind; and indeed, in Comparison with the Duration of the World. But, if the Coming of Christ was then reckoned near, 'tis certain, that it is much nearer now, and his Delay will be much shorter; yet this little Delay, both in one respect and the other, the Folly of fallen Man magnifies and abuses, to lull him asleep; but it is for far other Purposes, that Christ the blessed Bridegroom tarries. Not now to attempt to enumerate all the Reasons of his tarrying, some of which are indeed quite beyond our Penetration; we may particularly observe these two. He tarries to display his Forbearance

* Jam. v. 9.

to Sinners, ---- and to exercise the Graces of his Saints.

1. Christ delays his Coming, to display his Forbearance to Sinners.

Their amazing inveterate Folly, gives him indeed a thousand Provocations to come suddenly upon them, to surprise them in the most awful Manner, and deal with them according to their Deserts; but he delights not *in the Death of him that dies**; he does not presently cut down the barren *Fig-tree*, to refer to his own Parable, *Luke xiii. 6, 9.* but becomes a gracious Intercessor for it, that after the Barrenness of *three*, or many more than *three Years*, it may be *spared yet one Year more, that he may dig about it and dung it.*

Thus, O my unhappy Friends, who are yet in your Sins, is the Lord Jesus Christ dealing with you; he bears with you long, amidst a thousand Offences which you are foolishly giving him, amidst a thousand Instances of obstinate Deafness to his Voice, and Disregard of his Calls. He is using a Variety of Methods to warn you of your Folly, and reduce you from it; he calls again and again, and even a thousand and a thousand Times over; he sends his Servants, rising up early, and sending them; he tries you by a Variety of Providences, merciful and alarming, whether Mercies will melt

* Ezek. xviii. 32.

you; whether Afflictions will correct you; whether his multiplied Calls to others around you, to attend his Tribunal, will rouse you: he displays the Riches of his dying Love, and of his saving Grace; he condescends to beseech you by all the Glories of both; he displays the Terrours of his Wrath, and the solemn Events of his future Appearance to alarm you; his Servants call you in his Name; and there's nothing besides their own Safety and Acceptance before him at his Coming, and some Satisfactory Evidence and Earnests of it at present, that would give them such transporting Delight, as to see their Fellow-Creatures also prepared, for a safe and honourable Appearance before him. Conscience calls you in his Name; and must do it, till it is *seared as with a hot Iron* †. He gives you Time, Means, and a thousand pressing Calls, not to take only the Lamp of Profession, but to seek the holy Oil by which it is to be fed; he calls you to come to him for it; he assures you, *John vi. 37. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out*: and he causes the gracious Assurance to be repeated, and urged upon you in a Variety of Forms.

How exactly is he fulfilling that Word, *2 Pet. iii. 9. The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, as some Men count Slackness, but is long-suffering to us ward; not willing that*

† 1 Tim. iv. 2.

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any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance. O ye astonishing Monuments of his Forbearance, for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty Years, or more, hear ye the Voice of the tarrying Bridegroom, who delays in Pity to your destructive Folly; hear, and seek to be provided with the holy Oil of saving Grace for his Coming.

2. Christ delays his Coming, to exercise the Graces of his Saints.

He does it not to give them Time and Opportunity to sleep on, and take their Rest; but for the Trial of their Love to him; whether they will maintain their Affection and Duty to him inviolable, as long as he delays; whether they can live by Faith while he tarries, and maintain a powerful and influential Expectation of his speedy Appearance, and a diligent Preparation for it; whether they will continue to look and wait for his Coming, or forget it, and degenerate into a Temper resembling theirs, who have no Regard to it. He delays, to exercise their Patience under the Burdens and Difficulties of Life; to try how far they will humbly and submissively bear, as well as do his Will, and derive their Support and Comfort from the Expectation of his Coming.

But, O my Friends, what is the Issue of the Trial? how far is the End of our Lord's, our Bridegroom's Delay, answered with respect to

us? Does it kindle our Desire of his Coming? Is the Expectation of it to us like that of *Hope deferred, that makes the Heart sick, Prov. xiii. 12.* Do we look for it with that *Desire*, which, when it comes, will be a *Tree of Life*? Oh! that I could say, Oh! that you, my Brethren, could in general say, that it was so with us! He comes, but are we ready to give him a cordial Welcome, becoming the condescending Relation in which he stands, as the Bridegroom of our Souls? Do we look for the Day of our complete Union to him, with an Ardour resembling that, with which the Day of the conjugal Union is often expected? Oh! where is our Faith? Where is our living by it? Where is our Hope, our Joy, our ardent Desire, on the Thought of his Approach? our Concern to be well prepared for his Coming? our Patience under all the Burdens and Sorrows we meet with in Expectation of it? Alas, how different a View presents itself to us, in the general Sleep, both of the wise and foolish Virgins! how different a View, if we look into the State of our own Minds, and into the State of almost all around us! must it not be said of us, *While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

I proceed then to this melancholy Theme, the unhappy Charge against both the wise and foolish Virgins; they all slumbered and slept.
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The Charge indeed is general, and yet there seems plainly, in the Nature of Things, to be a Difference in the Degree, as well as in the Consequence of their Sleep, which some have expressed thus, the wise slumbered, and the foolish slept: but though this seems scarce sufficiently founded in the Text, yet there is apparently a Difference analogous to it; I have therefore proposed to consider the Sleep of the Foolish, and wise Virgins separately, and proceed,

II. To consider the Sleep of the foolish Virgins.

The Lord Jesus Christ hereby represents to us the deep Sleep, the fatal Lethargy which has taken hold of Sinners, and to which they yield themselves without any Efforts against it, or at least, without any worthy of the Name. And oh! how many awful Signs, how many melancholy Evidences of it are every where to be seen! Let us attend to some of them; and, may the blessed Spirit render the Account of them happily effectual, for the alarming of some, in whom they are found. Sinners then, appear to be asleep, by their Disregard to their Duty, or Carelessness in it ---- by their Neglect of inquiring into the State of their Souls ---- by their Insensibility of the most imminent Danger ----

by being unmoved with divine Warnings --- and by their delaying an Attention to their everlasting Concerns, when they are in some Degree awakened.

1. It is a sad Sign of the Sleep of Sinners, that they neglect the most important Duties, or are careless in the Performance of them.

We are not sent into the World to be idle; but have all a great Variety of Duties incumbent upon us, which cannot be neglected without the utmost Injury to our own Souls, and exposing ourselves to the righteous Displeasure of our great Master. The Word of God points out to us many Duties that we owe to God, to Ourselves, and to our Fellow-Creatures; and inforces them by the Authority of the Supreme Law-giver. The best Duties indeed, that we are capable of, are exceedingly imperfect, and can by no means merit the divine Favour, but the Command of God, the great Obligations we are laid under by his Goodness, and the Interest of our own Souls, bind us to them in the strongest Manner.

What then can be judged of those who have no Regard to them? who neglect the Duties they owe to their Fellow-Creatures, or those which they owe immediately to the blessed God, and their own Souls; and are unmoved by all the solemn Arguments by which they are pressed to them; but that they

they are in the worst Sense asleep? Whoever of you live without Prayer, or without diligent Converse with the Word of God; whoever of you can content yourselves from Week to Week, in the unnecessary Neglect of the Ordinances of God; or pray, or read, or hear, without any serious Regard to what you are engaged in, are surely fatally asleep: your extreme Carelessness about things so highly important, furnishes an awful Proof of it. And, are not you asleep, ye Parents, that neglect the precious Concerns of the Souls of your Children; that are not solicitous to instruct them in the great things of God; to urge them upon them as things of the greatest Importance; to lead them in his Ways by your own Example, and to restrain them from sinning against him? You love them, and yet disregard their most important Interests; and either lead them, or suffer them to run without Controul, in the Paths of Destruction. What melancholy Proofs of the Sleep of the Parents, do Multitudes of Children give to all around them! and the like may be said of the Neglect of any other plain and undeniable Duties of Religion.

2. Neglect of inquiring into the State of his Soul, is another sad Proof that the Sinner is asleep.

There's no Inquiry in the World so important, so necessary to our everlasting Safety,

ty, and none which they that are thoroughly awake will pursue with any comparable concern to this; "What am I? a Child of God, or an Heir of Wrath? And whither am I travelling? to endless Joy, or to irremediable and hopeless Misery?" Yet this most important Inquiry the Sinner neglects; he enters not into any close and serious Examination of his own Heart, but takes his everlasting Welfare for granted: he says, and will say, *I shall have Peace, though I walk in the Imagination of my own Heart**; and obstinately flatters himself that all shall be well with him for the World to come, without any tolerable Foundation for it: and Oh that there was no Reason to fear that this is the Case of any among us! Attend, my Friends, I beseech you, and let your own Consciences give in their Answer, to a Question I am going to ask you: When did you enter into any careful Inquiry into your own spiritual State? When did you try and examine yourselves by the infallible Standard of the Word of God, and solemnly ask yourselves, "Am I born again, and truly turned from Sin to God? have I experienced the Work of the Spirit of God on my Heart? and do I bear any genuine Marks and Evidences of it; a humble filial Love to God; an universal Dread of Sin, and Watchfulness against it; an ar-

* Deut. xxix. 19.

“dent Longing after the Lord Jesus Christ,
“after Conformity to him, and Commu-
“nion with him? Or am I a Stranger to this
“blessed Temper?” Surely if you have never entered into any such Inquiries as these, with a solicitous Concern that you might not be mistaken, and that your Hearts might be right with God; you have the utmost Reason to fear, that you are sleeping the dreadful, infatuated, fatal Sleep of the foolish Virgins.

3. The Insensibility of Sinners in the most imminent Danger, is another sad Evidence that they are asleep indeed.

It was agreeable to the Folly of the foolish Virgins, that they slumbered and slept, when they had the utmost Need to have been awake; and in like manner 'tis agreeable to the Folly that prevails in unconverted Sinners, that they sleep, dreadful as the Thought is, on the Verge of Hell. Alas! how deep, how infatuated a Sleep is it! A Sleep like that of the Drunkard, intoxicated with the Cup of Intemperance, that reduces him for the Time to the most stupid and insensible State.

You are sleeping, O Sinners, on the Borders of Destruction, and yet ignorant of it, and unconcerned about it: How plainly does it appear in your Conduct? Your whole Course of Life, and your constant Disposition of Mind demonstrates, that you are in

the worst and most dreadful Sense asleep. You are bound to Eternity; you know not that there is one Day of Life before you, and you are most unfit for your Passage out of it, and yet most thoughtless about it. *The Wrath of God abides upon you; you are condemned already;** there's nothing wanting but the Execution of the Sentence to make you most miserable for ever, and yet you are unconcerned about it. A Course of Sin is an awful Proof that the Soul is in a fatal Sleep; there needs no other: The Wretch is asleep indeed, that is going on in any known Disobedience to the blessed God, and venturing on the Terroures of Almighty Vengeance, fearless of that Wrath which must sink him to Hell; and it is a Sleep that must infallibly prove in the End, the Sleep of Death, unless sovereign Grace prevent. But he has no alarming, or at least, no effectual Sense of his Danger, of that immense Danger of everlasting Destruction that continually hangs over him; no hearty Concern to escape from it, to flee from the Wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal Life: he is as thoughtless about it as Persons in a sound, in a drunken Sleep, when devouring Flames rage about them, ready to consume them.

4. Sinners manifestly appear to be asleep, by their being unmoved with the divine Warnings that are given them.

* John iii. 18. 36.

It is one of the most astonishing and deplorable Spectacles in the World, to behold the extreme Inattention and obstinate Deafness of Sinners, under such Warnings from God, both by his Word and his Providence, as one would imagine it impossible, for Persons that have the least Sense of his Majesty, and Purity, and all-seeing Eye, to disregard. The Word of God sometimes speaks in Language of the most tender Mercy and Compassion, gives the most gracious Invitations, and expostulates in the strongest and most pathetick Terms. At other Times it sounds an Alarm terrible as the roaring of a Lion, or as a Clap of the loudest Thunder; but how many Instances does every Day, and especially every Sabbath, and every worshipping Assembly afford, of Persons no more moved with the one or the other, than if they were hearing the most trivial Things in Nature? They hear as if they heard not: the most gracious and alarming Messages are equally lost upon them: and, of all the Sinners in the World, perhaps hypocritical Professors are some of the most immoveable, as they buoy themselves up with a confident, though delusive Hope of their Safety.

The Warnings of divine Providence often produce as little Effect, as those of the Word of God; or if they produce any at all, 'tis but a very short and momentary one. Sinners still continue just the same as before;

as careless of their Souls and of the World to come, and as much intent upon the Pursuit of their Lusts as ever. *God speaks once, yea twice, but Man perceives it not**, at least, to any effectual Purpose; but goes on still in *the Way of his own Heart†*: and what can be reasonably thought of Persons so incapable of being moved, by either the Word, or the Providence of God, but that they are in a deep and lethargick Sleep? Once more,

5. Sinners appear to be in a most sleepy State, by their delaying an Attention to their everlasting Concerns, when they are in some degree awakened.

Sometimes the Insensibility of Sinners, great as it is, can scarce withstand the Solemnity of the Admonitions, which the Word and Providence of God give them: they are struck with an Apprehension of Danger, and seem for the present to be awaking: but the Language of their Hearts resembles that of the Sluggard, *Prov. xxiv. 33. Yet a little Sleep, a little Slumber, a little folding of the Hands to Sleep*: they are like a *Man beholding his natural Face in a Glass*, that sees some Spot there, but defers washing it off, and *straitway goes away and forgets what Manner of Man he was*: they say in their Hearts, *my Lord delayeth his Coming*, like the evil Servant that our Lord speaks of, *Luke*

* Job xxxiii. 14.

† Isa. lviii. 17.

xii. 45. to whom he threatens *that the Lord of that Servant will come in a Day when he looketh not for him, and in an Hour when he is not aware, and will appoint him his Portion with the Unbelievers.*

When Men are thus delaying from Day to Day, and from Year to Year, an Attention to Concerns of everlasting Importance; what an awful Evidence is it that they are sleeping indeed! And alas, how hard is it effectually to rouse them from it! and Oh that this very Day might not furnish a new Proof of it, in any among us, by their not awaking on the present Call from Christ.

Before I dismiss this melancholy Scene, and proceed to consider the Sleep of the wise Virgins, which I reserve for the Subject of another Discourse; I would attempt, if possible, to awaken those that are sleeping with the foolish Virgins, and offer some Arguments for that Purpose; to which I intreat every such Soul to give the most serious Attention, and even every one that has but a mis-giving Fear that the Case is his own, or that bears any Signs of a sleepy State of Soul; lest he should be found involved in the destructive Sleep of the foolish Virgins. Let then unconverted Sinners, and formal Professors, consider such Things as these: You have the means of awakening you at Hand ---- it is Satan that lulls you asleep ---- you are sleeping in the most dreadful Condition ---- the

--- the Coming of the great Bridegroom is near --- and his Coming must be terrible to you, if he finds you unprepared.

I. You have the Means of awakening you at Hand.

*The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged Sword**: 'tis wonderfully adapted to rouse the most sleepy Conscience, if it's Voice may but be hearkened to. Oh how many awful, alarming, startling Things does it speak from Time to Time! how often has it spoken such in your Ears! how frequently, and how solemnly has it been calling you, to awake from your long Sleep of Sin! how often has it been presenting *the Terrours of the Lord*†, on the one Hand, and the Grace of Christ on the other! Have not the Servants of God been, with respect to many of you, calling and admonishing you often, not only in publick but in private? and surely to sleep with the Means which God has appointed for awakening you in your Hands, and sounding in your Ears, is a grievous Aggravation of your Sleep.

But, alas! it is natural, and the Disease has deeply rooted itself in your Souls; yet there is a blessed Remedy even for this native Disease of the Mind. The Way to the Throne of Grace is open, there to seek awakening Mercy; if you were but so far awake, as to

* Heb. iv. 12.

† 2 Cor. v. 11.

be sensible of your sleepy State, and of the Sin and Danger of it, and to have any Degree of Concern to awake: and God has an Ear to hear the first Cry of the waking Sinner. But it will be the fullest Evidence imaginable that you are fast asleep indeed, if you disregard and slight the Means appointed to awake you.

2. Remember that it is Satan that lulls you asleep:

Such is the Account given you, *Eph. ii. 2.* *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the Course of this World, according to the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that now worketh in the Children of Disobedience.* Your Thoughtlessness, O Sinners, is not only the Effect of your native Corruption, great as it is; but the malignant Device of Satan against you, who is trying every Method to prevent your awaking, and endeavouring to stop the first Motions towards it, and to lull you afresh into the most dreadful Sleep. He does it, not because he desires your Ease, and Comfort, and Happiness; but with the worst Design imaginable: he aims at your Ruin, and labours to have you sleep on to Destruction. But Oh remember, who it is that persuades you to be from Day to Day thus thoughtless of your Souls, regardless of Religion, and negligent of your Duty, or careless in it: 'tis an Enemy that *hunts for*
K *the*

the precious Life * by this most cursed Device. Oh forget not the Malignity of his Design in general, and the execrable Purpose he is hereby particularly pursuing.

3. Remember you are sleeping in the most dreadful Condition.

It is a terrible Case, considered in itself, to be destitute of a Work of Grace in the Heart, to be Strangers to an inward Principle of the Fear of God, and Love to the Lord Jesus Christ, to Deliverance from *the Wrath to come* †, and an Interest in the heavenly Inheritance; and to have no Part of the great Work of Preparation for Eternity done: you can't be sufficiently pitied, nor your Misery sufficiently deplored on this Account. But to sleep in such a State as this, proclaims your Infatuation beyond Expression! What reasonable Foundation for Peace, and Hope, and Comfort, can you have in such a Case? Your Pleasures are vain and pernicious Delusions: and to you may be justly applied, whatever your outward Circumstances are, that striking Admonition to rich Sinners, *Jam. v. 1. Go to now, weep and howl for your Miseries that shall come upon you.* Though you make a Profession of Religion, it shall stand you in no Stead, but on the contrary, will add to your accumulated Wretchedness. And shall nothing a-

* Prov. vi. 26.

† 1 Thess. i. 10.

wake you? will you still sleep on, and still delude yourselves with the vain Imagination that you shall have Peace in the End? Fatal Cheat that you put upon your own Souls, while you are yet Strangers to the renewing of the Holy Ghost! Fatal Cheat, as it stands in direct Opposition to the strongest Assurances of the Word of God, that you shall have no Peace! Oh that I could prevail to rouse you from so foolish and destructive a Dream. Or will you flatter yourselves that you have yet Time sufficient before you to escape from the Wrath to come; remember then,

4. The Coming of the great Bridegroom is near.

His Coming to every one of us by Death, cannot be at any very great Distance. *When a few Years are come, then we shall go the Way whence we shall not return.* Job xvi. 22. Perhaps even but a few Months, or Days may yet remain for us upon Earth, before our almighty Judge will summon us to his Tribunal. The advanced Age of many of us proclaims that that great Event can be but a little Way off: perhaps the Infirmities and Disorders of Nature in others, proclaim the like solemn Admonition. We have many awful Warnings in the Removal of others, and know not at any Time, but that we ourselves may be within one Hour of an everlasting World. Amazing Thought, that

Men should sleep unprepared for the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when they know not but that he is just at Hand! Once more,

5. Remember with what Consternation you may justly expect to meet his Approach, if he find you in your Sins.

Have you not seen or heard of others that have gone on thoughtless from Day to Day, and from Year to Year, till the closing Period of Life; and when they have stood upon the Verge of Eternity, they have trembled; they have earnestly cried for more Time to be allowed them; but in manifold Instances they have cried in vain: Justice, provoked by former Delays, would allow no more. Do but suppose, my Friends, the Case to be your own: imagine yourselves to be presently summoned to appear before your Judge; to be thus alarmed, thus terrified at the Thought; to have little or no Evidence of your Interest in his Favour, to lay hold on, for your Support and Comfort. What a terrible Aspect must Death wear in such a Case as this! how dreadful to think, “ my Time is gone, and my Work undone: “ *the Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and “ I am not saved* *. Salvation has been long “ offered, and long slighted; I have yet “ gone on foolishly in the Way of my own “ Heart: And now the Opportunity of Sal-

* Jer. viii. 20.

“vation is irrecoverably lost.” Tremendous State to face the King of Terrors! Oh that every Soul among you would but seriously consider, how dreadful it would be, and learn now to make it the Object of your greatest and most earnest Concern to be ready, and to be found both in a State and a Frame, fit to meet the Lord Jesus at his Coming, whensoever it shall be.

S E R M O N VI.

The Wise VIRGINS sleeping.

M A T T H. XXV. 5.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

WE were last Lord's Day considering the further Folly of the foolish Virgins, besides their taking their Lamps and taking no Oil with them, that they slumbered and slept: and several Considerations were offered, to awaken those to whom this Character belongs: But with what Effect? Is there any poor sleeping Sinner among us, that has begun to awake out of the long and dangerous Sleep of Sin? Are not many, if not all, that were in this deplorable State before, as fast asleep as ever? Have you not slept away another Week, and advanced so much the nearer to an eternal World, **without** any Thought of it? Or, if any of you were in some Degree roused, have you not composed yourselves to sleep afresh, notwithstanding—

withstanding the Extremity of your Danger? Unhappy Creatures! yet, yet awake: call to Mind the Arguments that were then offered to alarm you, and cry for the Display of Almighty Mercy, effectually to awaken you, before Death and Hell do it too late.

But at present I leave those who are in this deplorable Case, and proceed,

III. To consider the Sleep of the Wise Virgins.

How surprising, and how lamentable the Case! but innumerable Facts shew it to be so prevailing in the several Ages of the World, and the Exceptions so few, as might lay a just Foundation for this general Charge; and it highly concerns each of us, my Christian Brethren, to examine how far we ourselves are involved in it, in the several Instances to be mentioned. I observe then, that even sincere Christians slumber and sleep, when there's great and long Formality in their religious Duties ---- when the Temper of their Hearts is but little spiritual ---- when the Tenderness and Watchfulness of Conscience is not well maintained ---- when the Word and Providence of God produce but little lasting Effect ---- when Time is not well improved ---- when there is but little Activity in Christ's Service ---- and

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when

when the Communion of the Saints is much neglected.

1. Even sincere Christians slumber and sleep, when there is great and long Formality in their religious Duties.

We worship that glorious and eternal Majesty, who sees the Secrets of our Hearts, and observes the Manner and the Temper of Mind, in which we draw near to him, much more than the outward Form of our Address. Our Lord tells us, and most solemn is his Word, *John iv. 23, 24. But the Hour cometh, and now is, when the true Worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.* If we are indeed made *wise to Salvation* *, we cannot be wholly insensible or regardless of this great Truth. Are we not convinced of its unspeakable Importance? Have not some of us often spoken of it to others, and urged them to attend to it? and yet, at the same Time, perhaps we may be deplorably forgetful of it ourselves, and greatly defective in its due Influence upon us.

If, notwithstanding our Conviction of the Importance of worshipping God spiritually, we are often formal and cold in our Worship, though we dare not neglect it, nor ab-

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

solutely allow ourselves in such Formality in it; if we often pray, as if we prayed not; if we read, or hear, or converse, as if we did no such thing; if our religious Duties leave but little Relish of them on our Hearts, and have but little Effect on the Temper of our Mind, and the Conduct of our Lives, to make us really the better; if we are but little concerned to have *Fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ †*, in our Approaches to God; 'tis surely an awful, startling, humbling Sign, that if we are numbered among the wise Virgins, yet we are slumbering and sleeping.

One such Duty is a Proof that the Soul is at that Time asleep: and who among us does not stand chargeable with many of them? how often do we in Effect sleep over our Prayers and other Duties, or perform them without a due Sense of the Majesty, Holiness, and all-seeing Eye of that God *with whom we have to do* ||, of the Blessings of his Love, the Terrours of his Frowns, and the infinite Importance of our Concerns with him? But if this unhappy State of Mind has been of long Continuance; if it has lasted Weeks and Months; and especially, if it has been nearly the same, for yet a longer Time; 'tis a melancholy Proof that we are shamefully asleep: and it is no wonder, if we have many Doubts, if we

† 1 John. i. 3.

|| Heb. iv. 13.

live much in Darkneſs, and enjoy but little of *the Light of God's Countenance* †, or if the Thought of Death is terrible to us, while we are thus aſleep. *Awake, therefore, thou that sleepest, ariſe from the Dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee Light*, according to the divine Call, *Eph. v. 14.*

2. Sincere Chriſtians themſelves ſlumber and ſleep, when the Temper of their Hearts is but little ſpiritual.

To be carnally minded is Death, but to be ſpiritually minded is Life and Peace *; but the Degrees of ſpiritual Mindedneſs are very different: in ſome rare Inſtances it prevails greatly, to the Honour of God, and to the unſpeakable Comfort and Advantage of his Servants; but in many other Inſtances, the Degree of it is ſo ſmall, that it leaves the Chriſtian greatly deſtitute of this bleſſed Advantage.

If we paſs from Time to Time, with but few affectionate Thoughts of God, but little longing after him, and but little panting for his gracious Smiles; if we riſe in the Morning, and our Hearts are preſently engroſſed by the Things of the World, and the World poſſeſſes our Hearts through the ſeveral Scenes of the Day; what Evidence is there of our Wakefulneſs in Chriſt's Service? How different was the Temper of the holy Pſalmiſt, *Pſal. cxxxix. 18. When I*

† Pſal. iv. 6.

* Rom. viii. 6.

awake,

awake, *I am still with thee*; how different the glorious Pattern which our Lord has set us, in what is said of him in Prophecy, in this respect, *Isa. 1. 4. He wakeneth Morning by Morning, he wakeneth mine Ear to hear as the learned*: There is, perhaps, scarce any thing that would contribute more to constant spiritual Mindedness, than to devote our first Thoughts in the Morning to God: But if, instead of this, our Morning Thoughts, and, in Consequence of them, our Thoughts through the several Hours of the Day, and when we compose ourselves to the Slumbers of the Night, are still vain and trifling, or still bent upon the Concerns of this World alone, where is our Spirituality? and what greater Proof can be given, of our being deplorably asleep?

3. When the Tenderness and Watchfulness of Conscience is not well maintained, 'tis a sad Sign, that, if Christians are sincere, they are yet asleep.

Conscience is Christ's Vicegerent in the Soul, to warn Sinners, and to quicken the Saints themselves: 'tis a tremendous Condition that a Person is in, when *his Conscience is seared as with a hot Iron**; when he is unmoved with every thing which might be expected to rouse and startle him; and sins without Fear or Remorse; and if it is so tremendous a Case in Sinners, every thing

* 1 Tim. iv. 2.

that

that bears the least Resemblance of it in sincere Christians, must be proportionably dreadful.

If there is any Ground for Reproach in our Conduct; if there is any Excess in the Use of worldly Enjoyments; if our Interest blinds our Eyes in our Dealings with others, and betrays us into things fordid and dishonourable, though not plainly unjust; if our Passions are turbulent, and our Tongues unruly; and Conscience does not take a quick Alarm on things so displeasing to God; if it is not watchful and suspicious lest we should depart from God, or its Voice is not well attended to, to make us more circumspect; 'tis a melancholy Evidence that we are in a very sleepy State.

4. Even sincere Christians slumber and sleep, when the Word and Providence of God produce but little lasting Effect.

There is indeed a Difference betwixt the Case of sincere Christians, and insincere Professors, in this respect; while the latter have at most, but some Startlings from the Messages of the Word of God, or the Admonitions of his Providence; the other are concerned to give them an attentive regard. But yet there are those unhappy Seasons in the Christian Life, and alas! in the Generality of Christians, many of them too, when the Word of God is heard without any considerable or abiding Effect; and the Provi-
dences

dences of God, if observed, yet produce no Effect answerable to their own Solemnity, or such only as is soon lost.

Who among us must not charge ourselves in this respect? how many of God's Messages do we hear, sometimes without any Impression, and at other Times, tho' with melting Heart, and some considerable present Emotions, yet soon forget them? the Advantage is not proportionable to the present Impression. Many of us have had our considerable Afflictions, and particularly, have lost those that were very dear to us: we were touched with the Providence, and not only felt the Smart, but we had our very serious Thoughts, formed important Resolutions upon those Occasions, and were concerned to bring forth some becoming Fruit in Consequence thereof; but are we indeed the more watchful and spiritual on the whole, than before? or, are we still nearly the same kind of Persons, going on with equal Carelessness and Inattention, Deadness and Formality, in our Duty; and with the same Attachment to things seen and temporal? if so, it is an awful and humbling Sign of a very sleepy State of Soul.

5. Christians are certainly asleep, when they do not diligently improve their Time.

Time is an important precious Jewel, which God has put into our Hands, and

which it greatly concerns us diligently to improve: 'tis the Season allotted for Preparation, for the eternal State to which we hasten. Everlasting Happiness or everlasting Misery are depending; and we expose ourselves to the Danger of losing the one, and incurring the other, in Proportion to the Degree in which we squander away our precious Time, which will soon arrive at it's Period, and be swallowed up in Eternity. God has therefore given us solemn and repeated Orders with respect to the Improvement of it, particularly, *Eph. v. 16. Redeeming the Time, because the Days are evil;* and *Col. iv. 5. Walk in Wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the Time: q. d. maintain a wise, benevolent, and engaging Behaviour towards Sinners; yet waste not your Time, by unnecessary and useless Intimacy with those, from whom you can get no Good, nor have any Prospect of doing them any important Service.*

Time is therefore to be redeemed, by avoiding vain and unprofitable Company, and trifling Conversation; and they that can content themselves to waste much of it in such a manner as this, and especially they that spend more Time than necessary Business renders unavoidable, in public Houses, certainly betray a deplorable sleepy State of Soul, if there is any Spark of Wisdom at all in them; and the more Time is thus wasted,

wasted, the more Reason there is to suspect whether there is any degree of Wisdom in them. Time is to be redeemed from vain and useless Thoughts, and an habitual Vanity of Mind, which is as great an Evidence as any of its sleepy State: but not to multiply Particulars of this nature, Time is further to be redeemed from the Employments and Entertainments of the World for religious Duties, and if these are either neglected, or hurried over, for want of Concern to get Time for the serious solemn Practice of them, we are in a Condition that ought to alarm us!

6. When Christians are but little active in the Service of Christ, they may be justly reckoned asleep.

We are under the highest Obligations to serve our gracious Lord, with Zeal and Delight. The Riches of his Grace, the Excellence of his Service, and the important Good which we may do to others, strongly bind us to it: both God and Man may justly expect, that these, and a Variety of other weighty Considerations, should engage us to do much for the Honour of our Lord, and for the Souls of those about us.

The Word of God often recommends Zeal and Ardour in his Service, industrious Endeavours to be useful to those around us, and a Conversation universally becoming and honourable; particularly, *Prov. x. 20,*

21. *The Tongue of the Just is as choice Silver: the Heart of the Wicked is little worth. The Lips of the Righteous feed many: but Fools die for want of Wisdom.* And again, *Prov. xv. 7. The Lips of the Wise disperse Knowledge: but the Heart of the Foolish doth not so:* and our Lord tells us, *John xv. 8. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit; so shall ye be my Disciples.* A lively and constant Attention to these divine Declarations, would make us distinguished Blessings to the World. A zealous, active, exemplary Christian, carries about with him so much of Christ and his Grace, and such solemn Impressions of everlasting Things, that he will be ready to every good Word and Work *, and all that converse with him may have Opportunity of getting good by him.

But if, on the contrary, we do but little for the Honour of our Lord, and are but little concerned for the Souls of those around us; if we are but little solicitous, that the Promise of God to *Abraham* may be fulfilled in us too, *Gen. xii. 2. Thou shalt be a Blessing;* if our Speech is not with Grace, and in the emphatical Language of the Apostle, *seasoned with Salt, Col. iv. 6.* if we content ourselves with doing as others do, and avoiding remarkable Evils; in a Word, if we rest in any thing short of Zeal and Ac-

* 2 Thess. ii. 17.

tivity in the Service of Christ, and of abounding in the Work of the Lord; we have Reason to be ashamed of so sleepy a State, and need to be roused.

7. When the Communion of the Saints is much neglected, 'tis a deplorable Sign of a general Sleep.

The wise Virgins, while asleep, could not quicken one another, nor perform the friendly Office of putting each other upon examining, whether they had sufficient Oil in their Vessels for the Service before them.

The mutual Fellowship and Intercourse of the People of God, is highly conducive to their spiritual Advantage, and therefore often recommended in his Word: it is particularly mentioned with great Approbation and Honour, as the Conduct of the People of God, in a Time of grievous and general Prevalence of Evil, described *Mal. iii. 15, 17.* wherein *the Proud were called happy, and they that wrought Wickedness were set up: Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the Day when I make up my Jewels, and I will spare them, as a Man spareth his own Son that serveth him.* And we are directed,

Heb. iii. 13. To exhort one another daily while it is called To-day, lest any of us be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin: And again, Heb. x. 24, 25. Let us consider one another, to provoke unto Love, and to good Works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the Manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as we see the Day approaching.

But when Christian Fellowship in Prayer, brotherly Admonition, and affectionate, spiritual Conversation languish and die, it is a deplorable Sign of a general Sleep: and oh, how much Reason is there to complain of it at present! Do we not fall greatly short, not only of the primitive Christians, but of many of our late Forefathers, in this respect? have not our Discords and Luke-warmness in Religion, given a fatal Blow to so important a Part of social Duty? and do they not to this Day afford us the utmost Reason for Shame and Humiliation?

Such things as these are the Marks of Slumber and Sleep in the wise Virgins. It now remains, that, according to the Method observed, when we were considering the Sleep of the foolish Virgins, I offer some Arguments to awaken Sleeping Saints: And oh, that they might be effectual on my own Heart, and those of all my Brethren, to rouse us to the utmost Activity in the Service of our Lord. Let us attend then
to

to such Considerations as these: The Lord Jesus Christ has been thoroughly wakeful, and active for our Salvation ---- it is the Bridegroom of our Souls that comes --- if we indeed belong to God, Heaven and eternal Glory is constantly drawing nearer ---- but our Sleeping deprives us of the Pleasure of the Expectation of it ---- it clouds the Evidence of our Interest in it ---- it is unworthy of our Christian Profession and Experience ---- it is dishonourable to our Lord ---- and it is an injurious Example to others.

III. The Lord Jesus Christ has been thoroughly wakeful, and active for our Salvation.

Well is it for us, that *his Thoughts are not as our Thoughts, nor his Ways as ours, but higher than ours, as the Heavens are higher than the Earth**. Blessed be his gracious Name, he has not slept over his great Undertaking, for the Salvation of our Souls; he entered readily into *the Counsel of Peace* † with the Father, to ransom us from Death and Hell; *he rejoiced*, as it is said of him, under the Name of Wisdom, *Prov. viii. 31. in the habitable Part of his Earth, and his Delights were with the Sons of Men*; he said, as we read of him in Prophecy, *Psal. xl. 7, 8. Lo, I come; in the Volume of the Book it is written of me: I delight to do thy Will, O my God; yea, thy Law is within my*

* Isa. lv. 8, 9.

† Zech. vi. 13.

Heart. When the Fulness of Time was come, he delayed not in the least, but came forth made of a Woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the Adoption of Sons*. He condescended to all the Abasement that was appointed for him, and endured, with divine Firmness, all the Scorn and Insults of Sinners. He magnified, and made honourable, by his own perfect Obedience, that holy Law†, which we had broken, fulfilled all Righteousness‡, and demonstrated, that when afterwards he was cut off§, it was not for any Sins of his own, but for the Sins of his People. He filled up the Time of his Pilgrimage below, with innumerable Labours for the Good of fallen Men, both with respect to their Bodies and Souls. He came as the Light of the World||, and was industrious to diffuse the blessed Beams of Knowledge and of Holiness, by his own Ministry, and that of his Apostles, whom he furnished and commanded to spread them to the Ends of the Earth.

In this blessed Course he frequently looked forward to his approaching Sufferings and Death, and spake of them even as the Object of his Desire, *Luke xii. 50. But I have a Baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?* and

* Gal. iv. 4, 5. † Isa. xlii. 21. ‡ Matt. iii. 15.
§ Dan. ix. 26. || John ix. 5.

again, when it was just ready to be consummated, he said, *Luke xxii. 15. With Desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer.* It was a Passover that was to issue to him in grievous and supernatural Agonies, in Ignominy, Blood, and Death; yet such great Things were to be accomplished in virtue of his Sufferings, that he welcomes a Scene so terrible to Nature, and longs for that, from which every one but himself, would have shrunk back with invincible Reluctance and Horrour. He went forth to meet his Murderers, and surrendered himself without Resistance into their Hands, though he shewed with what abundant Ease he could have delivered himself from them. *No Man took away his Life from him, he laid it down of himself**, when he might have defied the united Power of Earth and Hell, to have taken it from him, without his voluntary Consent to give it up. He gave himself for our Sins, and poured out his most precious Blood to expiate our Guilt, and bring us near to God.

Now, also on the Throne of his Glory, he ever lives to intercede for us: he sends his Word, his Servants, and his Spirit, for the Salvation of our Souls; and is using a Variety of most important Methods for this great End. “O my Soul,” let each of us that hopes in him say, “with what Ardour

* John x. 18.

“should such a Saviour be served! what
 “Return is it possible to make, that shall
 “bear the least Proportion to the Miracles
 “of his Grace? and what a Shame is it to
 “loiter and slumber in his Service!”

2. It is the Bridegroom of our Souls that comes.

Tender and most endearing Name, that he has assumed, and most gracious Relation into which he has entered to his People! Do we indeed love him? have we given up our Souls wholly to him? He stands then in this gracious Relation to us, has all the Tendernefs of it, and comes to give the most ample Proofs of his Affection.

With what Temper of Mind ought he then to be expected, under this endearing Character? and with what Diligence ought his Coming to be prepared for! how frequent should the Thought of it be, to those that love him! how pleasing, how enlivening! surely our Love to him is in Effect asleep, if the Expression may be allowed, if we think but little of his Coming, or think of it without Joy; and we do not, my Brethren, bear this Sign of languid dormant Love to Christ, if indeed we love him, that we either think but little of his Coming, or think of it with slavish Fear, or without that ardent Desire, that pleasing Hope, it demands? How often do we think of any
 desirable

desirable Event we expect in the present Life! how frequently do we repeat the same Thought, without being weary of it! how does our Imagination swell with pleasing Expectations, perhaps of something much greater and better, than there is any Foundation to hope for! how anxiously we wait for the Coming of a dear Relative, or beloved Friend that is expected! how long the Time seems! how slow do the Days, and Hours appear to pass along, till he comes! how ready are we to imagine every Sound we hear to be that of his Arrival! When we reflect upon the Eagerness of our Desires, upon low and common Occasions, what Reason have we to be ashamed, that we are such Strangers, as I fear most or all of us are, to such a Temper, with respect to our Lord and his Coming! Where is our Love to the Bridegroom of our Souls? alas! is it not faint, feeble, shamefully inactive?

If we love him indeed, let us seek to demonstrate that we do, by cultivating an ardent Affection to him, by the most diligent Preparation for his Coming, and by seeking to have every thing ready to give him a joyful Reception; our Hearts and Ways purified, and every thing offensive to him put far from us, our Souls adorned with the Graces of his Spirit, and our Love to him, and our Delight in him, strong and lively.

Not only the Love which we owe him demands it at our Hands, but the Blessedness we expect at his Coming, the unutterable Blessedness, of entering upon the Possession of all that his Love prepares for us, of compleat and everlasting Union to him, of perfect Enjoyment of his Love, of spending Eternity in his Presence, and under his incessant Smiles, and of having all his Glory, Dominion, and boundless Perfections engaged to make us happy. Do we love Christ, do we love ourselves, if Thoughts of this Nature are incapable of warming our Hearts, of exciting our Desires, and of quickening us to look, and prepare, and long for his Coming.

3. If we truly belong to Christ, Heaven and eternal Glory are constantly drawing nearer.

This is the Apostle's Argument to awaken sleeping Christians; and that Soul is greatly to be pitied that does not feel the Force of it, *Rom. xiii. 11, 12. And that knowing the Time, that now it is high Time to awake out of Sleep; for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed. The Night is far spent, the Day is at Hand; let us therefore cast off the Works of Darknes, and let us put on the Armour of Light.*

O thou that lovest Christ in Truth, thou art one Week nearer the Sight and Enjoyment of him, one Week nearer to eternal Glory, than
when

when we were before considering these Words: every Day brings nearer that most blessed of all Days, when thou shalt enter into his Presence, and behold with everlasting Rapture, that Saviour that hung bleeding on the Cross for thee. Thou shalt see his bright Scars, behold him as a Lamb that was slain, and hear the transporting Anthems of Praise, that sound through all the heavenly Temple to his Honour. And it is nearer to Day, than it was Yesterday; nearer than when we entered into this Place of Worship. And dost thou still sleep? what if the blessed Redeemer should say to thee, as to the Thief on the Cross, *To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise**; would not the transporting Word awaken every Sentiment of Joy and Gratitude, of longing Desire, great Expectation, and delightful Imagination of the Glory so speedily to be revealed? We know not, if we are indeed the Friends and Followers of Christ, but that it may be so: but should it be longer deferred, what is the utmost extent of human Life, but like a Day, an Hour, a present fleeting Moment?

Look forwards: a few more rolling Years, hastening fast to their End, open to a Believer this glorious Scene. And can there be a more cogent Argument, to rouse us to Watchfulness, to wean our Hearts from the World, to raise us above its Smiles or its

* Luke xxiii. 43.

Frowns, its alluring or disquieting Vanities, than this, that we shall soon be with Jesus? every Hour, every Breath we draw, brings nearer the glorious Day of release from Flesh and Sin, and of perfect everlasting Triumph in his Presence.

If these blessed and delightful Arguments had their due Weight on our Hearts, there would be the less need for those that are yet to be offered: but alas, we are so *slow of Heart* † to learn, and so difficultly quickened, that it is needful to add yet other arguments, and it will be well, if all are enough to rouse us from our injurious Sleep. I add then,

4. Our sleeping deprives us of the Pleasure of the Expectation of Christ's Coming.

With such glorious Views and such delightful Hopes, one would be ready to say, what Heart that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, can forbear leaping for Joy, in Expectation of the Accomplishment of them? But must it not rather be said, what Heart does so? how few are found that have learnt to look for the future Appearance of Christ with that Pleasure, which so glorious an Object demands? Strange, that the Coming of so amiable and gracious a Friend, so condescending and affectionate a Bridegroom, should be so little thought of with Desire

† Luke xxiv. 25.

and

and delightful Hope! but alas, it is the natural Effect of that indolent sleepy State, into which the wise Virgins themselves are in great Danger of falling.

To look much for the glorious Appearance of the Son of God, is wonderfully adapted to sooth our Sorrows, to furnish delightful Entertainment, and raise our Happiness to a Degree which nothing of an earthly Nature can produce. Many of God's Servants have found it so, and have tasted such Pleasures in the Expectation of the Coming of Christ, as *Strangers intermeddle not with* *; they have fed as it were upon heavenly Manna; they have tasted double Sweetness in their Mercies; they have borne the disquietudes of Life with sacred Calmness and Composure, and faced the King of Terrours with Delight, instead of Dread.

But while we forget our Lord, sleep over his Service, and remain in a State of Indolence and Inactivity; we have none of these sacred Entertainments to expect: we cannot look forward with eager Desire, for the Coming of our Saviour whom we love but little, think of but little, and our Interest in whom is, by a natural Consequence, yet doubtful to us. The sleeping Christian cannot *rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God, nor haste unto the Coming of the Day of God*, according to

* Prov. xiv. 10.

the divine Direction, 2 Pet. iii. 12. When Christ says, *surely I come quickly*, he can scarce heartily answer with the Apostle John, Rev. xxii. 20. *Amen, Even so come Lord Jesus*. He can scarce lay any firm and delightful Hold on the Character of *them that love his appearing*, and on the Promise of *the Crown of Righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give to them that do*, 2 Tim. iv. 8. Oh how much waking Pleasure, and substantial Delight does a slothful, slumbering State of Soul deprive us of! and how powerful an Argument should this be to us to awake out of Sleep!

5. Sleeping in Christ's Service will cloud the Evidence of our Interest in him, and in the Blessings of his Coming.

It cannot but do so, as it deprives us of the fairest Evidences of our Relation to him, fervent Affection to him, Ardour in his Service, and Communion with him: it makes the Difference betwixt the sincere Christian, the secure and careless Sinner, less easy to be discerned, either by the Christian himself or others. Who could have distinguished the wise and foolish Virgins, when both were slumbering and sleeping, except that Eye, which searches the Secrets of all Hearts, and tries the Reins of the Children of Men?

And as this is the natural Tendency of sleeping in the Service of Christ, so it grieves

*the Spirit of God**, and provokes him to with-hold from us his gracious *Witness with our Spirits, that we are the Children of God*†. This Argument therefore the Apostle urges, to guard us against every thing offensive to the holy Spirit, *Eph. iv. 30. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the Day of Redemption.* Would we have our sealing Seasons by the Influence of the blessed Spirit? 'tis of the utmost Consequence to be wakeful, and active in the Service of our Lord, for the Spirit cannot be justly expected to seal to the Day of Redemption, the slothful and the indolent Christian.

Let me add, that in Proportion to the Degree in which we neglect to guard against Sleeping, and especially in which we indulge ourselves to sleep in Religion, there is real Danger of a fatal Mistake; there's Reason to fear, that it is an Artifice which our great Adversary practises, to the Ruin of Multitudes of Souls, to endeavour to keep them at Ease, with such a Thought as this; "Both the wise and foolish Virgins slumbered and slept; I may therefore be one of the wise, though asleep." If we can satisfy ourselves in a State of Insensibility and Negligence, with respect to spiritual and everlasting things, by such a Presumption, we have Reason to fear lest we deceive ourselves,

* Rom. viii. 16.

† Eph. iv. 38.

and are really numbered among the foolish Virgins.

6. Our Slumbers are unworthy of our Christian Profession and Experience.

The Apostle argues upon this Principle, *1 Thess. v. 4, 6. But ye, Brethren, are not in Darknes, that that Day should overtake you as a Thief. Ye are all the Children of Light, and the Children of the Day: we are not of the Night, nor of Darknes. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

Our Profession of having seen the Evil of Sin, and been turned from it to God, demands great Watchfulness, to stand at the utmost Distance from it, to *abstain from all Appearance of Evil**, and *hate even the Garment spotted by the Flesh†*; to cleave closely to the Lord, and *wholly to follow him‡*; to live upon him as the Fountain of Life and Happiness; and to guard against every thing, that would cause any Distance and Estrangement betwixt him and our Souls. We profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, to admire his Grace, to chuse him as the Portion of our Souls, and depend upon him for our present and future Happiness; to come to God by him, to expect Acceptance through his perfect Righteousness, and prevailing Intercession; to look for the Glory purchased by his Blood, and secured to all his People

* *1. Thess. v. 22.* † *Jude. 23.* ‡ *Josh. xiv. 8.*

by his Promise, and to wait for his Coming to put us in Possession of it. *What Manner of Persons ought we then to be, in all holy Conversation and Godliness* * ? how watchful, how spiritual, how full of Love to Christ, how fervent in our Approaches to God through him ? and how earnestly pressing forwards in the Way to the Crown of Glory ?

Our Experience, as well as our Profession, demands the utmost Watchfulness. If we are sincere Christians, if we have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, to see and judge of things, in some Degree, in their own true Light ; we have seen our Misery as Sinners, our Need of Christ as a Saviour, the Obligation and Advantage of warm Affection to him, the Excellence of his Service, and the mischievous Nature of Coldness and Deadness in it ; we have experienced *the renewing of the Holy Ghost* †, and have felt the Power of future and eternal Objects. Have we then been led to an Acquaintance with such Things as these ? have we found, from one Time to another, in the several Scenes of the Christian Life, the quickening Influences of the Blessed Spirit ? have we met with God in our Approaches to him, and tasted the Sweetness of his Word ? has he sealed to us the Pardon of our Sins, and cheered us with the

* 2 Pet. iii. 11.

† Tit. iii. 5.

Hope of his Love. To forget the Excellence of spiritual Blessings, and the unspeakable Solemnity of Things to come, after such Experiences as these; to loiter in Christ's Service, and sleep away the Time, that ought to be employed in *pressing towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus* ||, must be highly aggravated in itself, and greatly offensive to him.

7. Our sleeping dishonours Christ and his Grace.

What a manifest Tendency has it, and how grievous an Effect, to hinder us from honouring him? What do we, or what can we do for his Glory, while asleep? If instead of Ardour and Alacrity in his Service, we have little or nothing to say of him to those with whom we converse, and especially, if our Duty in other respects too is in Part neglected; if our Conversation, Prayers, and other Duties are cold, formal, and insipid; and if we are often swerving from our Obedience; what Honour do we do to our Lord? and, on the contrary, how much do we dishonour him? do we not in Effect represent him to others as less excellent, less glorious, and less gracious, than we profess to believe him to be? And indeed, who that observes the Inactivity and Want of Watchfulness, of the greater Part of Chris-

|| Phil. iii. 14.

tians,

tians, in the Service of Christ, would imagine that they serve, or that they believe that they serve, so glorious and so gracious a Lord, and that his Service is so excellent, so delightful, and so advantageous as it is? This leads me to add once more,

8. Our sleeping in Christ's Service is an injurious Example to others.

It has a grievous Tendency to harden the Hearts of Sinners, when they see but little Difference, betwixt those that profess themselves to be Christ's Servants, and others; and but little more Watchfulness and exemplary Conversation in the former, than the latter; when they appear but like other Men, and discover but little Zeal in the Service of their Lord, and little Earnestness in the Way to eternal Life. The Eyes of others are especially fixed, upon those that profess themselves to be the Followers of Christ; they will easily satisfy themselves in sleeping, if those do so who have long professed to love him, who have been of many Years standing in his House, and who ought to be endeavouring to awake them.

And, not only Sinners, but other Christians themselves, are in danger of being injured by so unhappy an Example: the Sloth of the Mind is contagious, and spreads from one to another; 'tis difficult for any to keep up the Life and Fervour of Religion amidst

a general Lukewarmness. While we sleep therefore, in the Service of our Lord, we contribute to the Negligence of others, and do much to injure their Souls.

These, and a Variety of other Arguments, might easily occur to us, that are greatly adapted to awaken sleepy Saints, and rouse them to Activity in the Service of Christ: let us review them when we leave the Ordinances of God, and often reflect seriously upon them; but, if instead of this, we think no more of them, and make no Application of them to ourselves; there's great Reason to fear that we shall still sleep on, suffer all this Injury to our own Souls, do all this Hurt to the Souls of others, and bring all this Dishonour to our Lord. Let us especially cry much to God for his Spirit, to rouse and quicken us to *run* with eager Delight, and unalterable Constancy, in *the Way of his Commandments* *. Let us be often looking into, and conversing with that Word which is *quick and powerful* †, to rouse slumbering and inactive Souls, and often look upwards to an unseen Saviour, and an unseen World, to animate us in the Pursuit of its eternal Blessedness.

* Psal. cxix. 32.

† Heb. iv. 12.

S E R M O N VII.

The M I D N I G H T C R Y.

M A T T H. XXV. 6.

And at Midnight there was a Cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.

AS the whole of the Parable before us, so this Part of it in particular, is greatly adapted to rouse Sinners from their destructive Lethargy, and sleeping Saints from their unworthy and injurious Slumbers, as it directs our Attention, to an Object, which above every thing in Nature demands it; the future Appearance of the Son of God, and the unspeakable Importance of being prepared to meet him; and it is inexpressibly desirable, that every Soul that hears this awakening Alarm, might be effectually

fectually engaged seriously to consider its own great Concern therein.

The coming of Christ to Judgment, at the last Day, seems to be immediately intended by the Bridegroom's Coming; because our Lord speaks of the general Reception of the wise, and Exclusion of the foolish Virgins; and the Remainder of this Chapter plainly relates to that great Solemnity; yet it is evident, that it may also naturally represent his Coming to every one of us by Death, which will be to us equally decisive, and is perhaps in general, more adapted to awaken the Conscience, than the Thought of Christ's second Appearance, because it is considered as nearer: both these, therefore, may not improperly be taken into our View, in the following Meditations on these Words.

To me, to you, to every one, without Exception, is this solemn Warning given; all must shortly hear the Midnight Cry, with respect to themselves: Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Oh that all would so hear the Warning beforehand, that when this great Event takes place, they might meet it without Surprise or Dread.

In discoursing on these Words, I propose to consider,

I. The

I. The Time when the Cry here spoken of, is represented as made.

II. The Nature of the Cry.

III. The Import of it. And,

IV. The Call attending it. Let us consider,

I. The Time when the Cry here mentioned, is represented as made, *viz.* at Midnight.

This may naturally lead us to observe, that it was after some considerable Delay ---- when the Light of the Lamps was most needful ---- and when Men are generally in the deepest Sleep.

I. The Cry that the Bridegroom came, was made after some considerable Delay.

Perhaps both the wise and foolish Virgins expected that it would have been made much sooner, and even in the Beginning of the Evening; but the Bridegroom on the contrary deferred it till Midnight: By which the Lord Jesus intimates to us the long Delay of his second coming, as it would appear to us. It is indeed often represented as *near*, and *the Judge as standing at the Door* *;

* Jam. v. 8, 9.

both to keep us ever watchful, and because indeed it is near, in comparison with the endless Ages of Eternity, and especially so to us *upon whom the Ends of the World are come**: And Death, which will be to each of us in particular the Coming of Christ, is probably much nearer still than his Appearance to judge the World. From these Representations of that most solemn Day as near, the primitive Christians, those eminently wise, but in part mistaken Virgins, were ready to expect it even in their Days, till more fully instructed to the contrary by the Apostle, *2 Thess. ii. 1, 2. Now we beseech you, Brethren, by the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in Mind, or be troubled neither by Spirit, nor by Word, nor by Letter, as from us, as that the Day of Christ is at Hand.* And he afterwards proceeds to acquaint them, that there would be first a falling away, and *the Man of Sin, would be revealed, the Son of Perdition*, whom he describes in Characters that point out the anti-christian Church of Rome, too plain to be mistaken.

While the wise Virgins thus expected the speedy Appearance of the heavenly Bridegroom; we read of such Fools that should come in the last Days, *2 Pet. iii. 4.* who, because Christ did not come so soon as they

* *1 Cor. x. 11.*

imagined they had been taught to expect, would say, *Where is the Promise of his Coming? for since the Fathers fell asleep, all Things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.* Though we dare not imitate the Language of these Scoffers, yet perhaps the Delay of Christ's second Coming seems as long to us, as that of his second Coming probably did to the Jews, when it was deferred four thousand Years, from the Time of the first Promise that was given of it, on the Fall of our first Parents. We see already betwixt seventeen and eighteen hundred Years gone, since his Appearance at first in the World; and from this Delay, Mankind are ready to lay aside the Expectation of it, or at least all Concern to be prepared for it; against which the Apostle solemnly warns us, *2 Pet. iii. 8, 9. But beloved, be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day. The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, as some Men count Slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*

The same important Caution is highly needful, with respect to the Delay of Christ's Coming to ourselves in particular. Under a Pressure of Affliction and Grief, our Impatience is sometimes ready to lead us to think it long; but in a Season of Prospe-

nity we grow thoughtless of it, are unwilling to imagine it near, and, on the contrary, are ready to say in our Hearts, *our Lord delayeth his Coming**; it is the natural Language of the Sinner, who thereby lulls himself into a fatal Security; and even the sincere Christian is in Danger of falling in part into the same Temper, and putting off in his Thoughts, the Coming of Christ to some distant Time. Who that knows his own Heart, does not find a grievous Propensity to it? We are ready to flatter ourselves with our seventy Years at least, which to us seems long, especially in the earlier Part of Life; though in God's Account 'tis a Moment, a Point of Time: Perhaps when Nature has languished under the Force of some threatening Disease, we have thought the Coming of our Lord at hand; but when we have been favoured with renewed Health, have we not laid aside the Expectation of it, and learnt to regard it afresh as yet at a great Distance, though in Reality so much the nearer, and approaching with equal Pace, when we recover from Affliction as when we fall into it?

Our Lord therefore, speaking according to our Conceptions of Time, says, Ver 19. of this Chapter, *After a long Time, the Lord of those Servants cometh, and reckoneth with them:* though he delays his coming one Year after

* Luke xii. 45.

another,

another, yet he certainly comes at last; and the longer he has already delayed, so much the sooner will he now come: perhaps his coming is just at hand, while we imagine it yet at a great Distance, and while we are counting upon many future Years, God may say, *this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee* *.

2. The Coming of the Bridegroom was at a Time, when the Light of the Lamps was most needful.

The Hour of Midnight is a dark Hour, when there is special need of something to give Light to those, who have any Affairs, which then require their Attention. In like manner the Time of Christ's coming both for the Judgment of the World, and to us in particular by Death, is a Time when we shall need the brightest Light, that can be derived from the most honourable and becoming Profession, and from the highest Degrees of Acquaintance with God, and Christian Experience, to cheer our Minds, and enlighten the Darkneſs with Beams of Hope and Joy.

While we conſider it as at a Diſtance, we generally ſee but little of its Solemnity; but when it appears at hand, it puts on a moſt ſolemn Aſpect. Were the Lord Jeſus to appear in his Glory this Day, this Week, or this Year, and had we any previous No-

* Luke xii. 20.

tice of it, on which we could depend, how much need should we see, of the fairest Evidence of an Interest in him, supported by the most close and humble walking with him! How many solemn alarming Thoughts would arise in our Minds! how many Inquiries would it awaken us to make, with respect to our Relation to him, and our Experience of the Work of his Spirit on our Hearts.

In like manner, when Death appears at hand, how different is the Aspect of Things, from what it is at other Times! Slight Hopes and doubtful Evidences of our belonging to Christ, which often, too easily quiet the Mind upon other Occasions, are then found insufficient to do it: there must be clear Evidence and lively Hopes, to teach us to give him that cordial Welcome, which becomes his Servants, and which our own Peace in that solemn Day requires, that we should be able to give him. *The Valley of the Shadow of Death** is gloomy, and needs bright Evidence of Grace, and the *Light of God's Countenance* to enlighten it. Wretched Condition of those whose Lamps of Profession, like those of the foolish Virgins, are then gone out! and on the contrary, most happy is the State of those, who can say with the Apostle, 2 Cor. i. 12. *For our rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity,*

* Psal. xxiii. 4.

† Psal. iv. 6.

not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we have had our Conversation in the World: And again, when the Time of his departure was at hand, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. If we would be able to triumph in like manner, it is highly important, that the Lamp of our Profession should be well supported by an inward Principle of saving Grace, and shine with the fair Lustre of a *Conversation becoming the Gospel* *. Our Lord indeed has no need of it, like the Bridegroom in the Similitude he uses: but we have great need of it, both for our Safety, and our Comfort and Hope in the gloomy Hours of Death.

3. The Bridegroom came in that Season, when Men are generally in the deepest Sleep.

Such, to the generality of Mankind, is the Hour of Midnight; and such to the generality of Mankind, will be the Time of the coming of Christ. Thus our Lord describes the State of things at his coming for the Destruction of Jerusalem; and the close Connection, betwixt his Account of that awful Event, and of his coming at the Day

* Phil. i. 27.

of Judgment, intimates that it would be so then, *Matth. xxiv. 12. And because Iniquity shall abound, the Love of many shall wax cold.* He represents it, *Luke, xvii. 26, 30.* As a Time like that when the old World was drowned in the Days of Noah, and when Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt in the Days of Lot; *they did eat, they drank, they married Wives, they were given in Marriage, they bought, they sold, they builded, they planted,* quite thoughtless of those awful Judgments, till the fatal Days themselves came, though they had so many threatening Symptoms upon them of approaching Vengeance, and so many Warnings of it by these holy Men; And our Lord adds, *even thus shall it be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed.* It is a Question, which strongly intimates the deplorable State in which Mankind shall then be found, which our Lord asks, *Luke, xviii. 8. Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find Faith on the Earth?* and he adds, *Luke, xxi. 35. That as a Snare shall that Day come on all them that dwell on the Face of the whole Earth.* How awful are these Representations of the general Sleep and Security, in which Mankind shall be found, at that solemn Day, when the Lord Jesus shall suddenly surprise them, with the Appearance of his Glory, *with the Shout of the Archangel, and with the Trump of God*!* and are

* 1 Thess. iv. 16.

we not in general, just in such a sleepy careless State of Mind, as that in which Mankind shall then be found? So much the more alarming are the Signs that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Just such also, in innumerable Instances, is the State and Temper of Men, when Death, the Messenger of divine Justice, arrests them, and conveys them to the great Tribunal. One Week they are wholly engrossed with the Concerns of the World, or the Pursuit of their Lusts, and the next in the Grave: One Day or Hour, as thoughtless of an eternal World, as ever they were in their Lives, as thoughtless of it as if there was no such World at all, and the next Day or Hour, or even the next Moment, entered upon it, standing before their Judge, and fixed for Eternity by his righteous Sentence. The coming of Christ in this Sense, as well as his coming to judge the World at the last Day, is as the coming of a *Thief in the Night* *, when it is quite unthought of, and when Men are in the deepest Sleep, and the most fatal Security. It is a Threatening, which particularly demands the Attention of those who are ready to say, “ ’Tis time enough yet to think of Death and Eternity,” expressly denounced against such evil Servants, *Matth. xxiv. 50. The Lord of that Servant, shall come in a Day when he looketh not for him,*

* 1 Thess. v. 2.

and in an Hour that he is not aware of; to which may be added the like Warning, Rev. iii. 3. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou shalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee. Such are the Warnings that Christ has given to Persons of this Character; and *you shall know, O delaying Sinners, whose Word shall stand**, Christ's or yours.

And it highly concerns sincere Christians to remember, that they can by no means depend upon Christ's coming, when his coming would be least alarming and most desirable; when they are most diligent in his Work, and their Duties most spiritual; when Grace is in the most lively Exercise, and spiritual Objects make the deepest Impression on their Minds: perhaps on the contrary, it may be at such a Season, of which, there is reason to fear, there are many in the Lives of the greatest Part of Christians, when the Mind is in a sleepy State, Grace little in Exercise, and Duties most cold and formal; if we wander from God, and give way to our own Corruptions, that unhappy Hour may be the very Hour, when Christ will come: It is therefore manifestly of great Importance to watch continually, lest our Lord should come, and find us in such a State, according to his own Order, *Mark xiii. 35, 36. Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the Master*

* Jer. xliv. 28.

of the House cometh ; at Even, or at Midnight, or at the Cock-crowing, or in the Morning, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping : And again, Luke, xxi. 34. Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your Hearts be overcharged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness, and the Cares of this Life, and so that Day come upon you unawares.
I proceed,

II. To consider the Nature and Characters of the Cry here made.

And it may be observed, that it was a sudden--an awakening--and a surprising Cry.

I. The Midnight Cry was a sudden Cry.

As soon as the Bridegroom declares his Pleasure to come, the Alarm is given, and the Cry is made, *Behold he cometh*, without any further previous Notice given to the Virgins, to prepare themselves for his Approach, which might be reasonably presumed to be unnecessary, as they knew that he would come, and were themselves come forth to meet him. The Gospel gives us many Assurances that Christ will certainly, and soon come ; but it acquaints us not with the Time, nor does it promise us any other Warning, but requires us to be always ready, and always watchful.

Our Lord represents to us the Suddenness of his second coming, by a striking Similitude, *Matth. xxiv. 27. For as the Lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto*

the West; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. And, in like manner, his coming by Death is often exceedingly sudden; no Warning is given, and no Time is allowed for any Preparation, that had been till then neglected; no Room for any solemn Examination, Humiliation, and Repentance, any Returns to God, or any Cries for Pardon and Salvation. What numerous Instances of this nature have many of us seen or heard of! And perhaps there have been some even in our own Families: And have not some of us had Warnings of the like nature in our own Persons, in sudden Accidents or Diseases, which though they have not been fatal, yet have carried in them a very solemn Admonition, that Death itself may come, in as surprising a manner, and Christ's Summons to appear before him be as sudden, as these its Fore-runners? Or should it not be so sudden, yet perhaps, as we often see in others, Reason may be so impaired, or the Force of the Disease be so great, almost from the first Moment of it's Attack, that there may be scarce any more Room for Preparation for our Appearance before God, than if Death itself had been absolutely sudden.

2. The Midnight Cry was an awakening Cry.

It was such as roused the Virgins, both wise and foolish, from their deepest Sleep. And thus it will be at the second coming of

Christ : When he appears in his Glory in the Clouds, the most indolent and drowzy Christian, and the most secure and thoughtless Sinner upon Earth, must awake at once : This Midnight Cry shall also awake the most sleepy Conscience : All the Deceitfulness of Sin, the Artifice of Satan, and the Hardness and Obstinacy of Sinners, cannot preserve them unmoved, at the Approach of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he comes to summon them to appear before him.

Thus also the Coming of Christ by Death will alarm those that are in the deepest Lethargy : In many Instances it does so, before Death has dissolved the Union of the Soul and Body ; but it never fails to do it as soon as that Dissolution is compleated. If Parents, Christians, Friends, Ministers, Sabbaths, and the Gospel, cannot awaken you, O Sinners, Death will certainly do it : The drouzy Conscience must then start from its deepest and most lasting Sleep. Oh you in the Days of Youth, that are so intoxicated with the Pleasures of Sense, that you have no Ear to give to the Admonitions of God or his Servants ; you also that by the long Practice of Sin have *seared your Consciences, as with a hot Iron* *, and reduced yourselves to a State *past feeling* † ; and you that are grown old in Sin almost beyond the Hope of Man's ever prevailing to awaken

to gain * 1 Tim. iv. 2. † Eph. iv. 19.

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you ;

you; hear, this once at least, the Word of eternal Truth: Know assuredly that there is a Day at Hand, which will do what weeping Parents, intreating and heart-broken Ministers, expostulating Friends, gracious or solemn Providences, and the Invitations and Threatenings of God himself, could not do; a Day which will thoroughly rouse you, but perhaps too late, when the Door of Hope and Mercy is for ever shut and barred.

3. The Midnight Cry was a surprising Cry.

We have probably known what a Surprise it is, to be suddenly awaked out of a deep Sleep, by any thing before unthought of, and can form some Idea of the terrible Alarm that it must be, to be awaked by Thieves breaking into our Houses, by the Cry of Fire, by the Shock of an Earthquake, or by invading Enemies: But how small are all these things, in comparison with the Astonishment which will seize both profane Sinners and hypocritical Professors, when Christ comes at the last Day! What Amazement, what Consternation, what Horror will fill the Hearts, both of his open Enemies, and of his counterfeit Friends, when he appears on a sudden in the Clouds, and flashes the Beams of his Glory from one end of the Earth to the other!

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What Confusion does the Approach of Death often strike into the slumbering Conscience, when it seems just at hand at once ! and how much more dreadful will it be to the Sinner, when he opens his astonished Eyes upon his Tormentors, upon the flaming Throne of his Judge, and all the Terrors of his frowning Face, upon the wide extended Regions of Darknes, the Fire that shall never be quenched, and all the miserable Companions of his Ruin ! Oh fear, shun, and seek to be guarded against that awful Scene while you may. Yet after all that has been said, I much fear that the Coming of Christ will be exceedingly surprising to some among us, that will not be perswaded to attend to it before : But must not you acknowledge even in all the Wildness of Despair that you were warned ?

The Coming of Christ will be to you also, my Brethren, that have believed in him, a surprising Event, if you have neglected to live in Expectation of it ; if the Evidences of your Interest in him are dark and doubtful, and especially if Conscience, at that solemn Day, should groan under any particular Pressure of Guilt, not removed by deep Repentance, and a humble believing Application to the Blood of Jesus, for your cleansing. Having thus considered the Time and the Nature of the Cry here made, we are next,

III. To take a View of the Import of the Cry itself; or what it was that was cried, *Behold the Bridegroom cometh.* And it plainly signified the Fulfilment of his Appointment --- and the Period of his Delay.

I. The Cry that the Bridegroom came, signified the Fulfilment of his Appointment.

The Virgins are manifestly supposed to have had Notice of his Marriage, either directly from himself, or by other Means, which was a virtual, if not attended with an exprefs Appointment from him to come that Night, and accept the Service of such of his Friends, as were willing to attend him; and the Cry that he was coming, imported that he was now about to fulfil his Appointment.

The Lord Jesus Christ has declared, upon many Occasions, the Certainty of his Coming, in both the Views of it that have been mentioned; and his Word is *yea and amen*, * *inviolably faithful*, and the Accomplishment of it sure. When he comes in his Glory, every Creature shall be convinced, that *we have not followed cunningly devised Fables*, in our Belief of *his Power and Coming* †; and every Tongue shall acknowledge, “ Now is the
“ divine Word, and all the Warnings it has
“ given of this great Event, abundantly veri-
“ fied: Now it appears that they were truly

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

† 2 Pet. i. 16.

“ wife,

“wise, that believed and stood in awe of
“them, and they the most infatuated of
“Mankind that despised or disregarded
“them.”

In like manner, thoughtless as a great Part of Mankind are of Death, and especially in this View of it, as the Coming of Christ, to decide their everlasting State; the Time which infinite Wisdom has determined, will certainly verify the divine Declaration, *Heb. ix. 27.* that *it is appointed unto Men once to die, and after this the Judgment*: And as it is undeniably evident, that no Degrees of Health or Strength, no Redundancy of Spirits, nor Gaiety of Heart can prevent the Stroke of Death; so it is equally certain, that no Boldness of Infidelity in denying, nor Infatuation of Impiety in disregarding the Judgment that is to follow it, can prevent the Accomplishment of the wise and righteous Determination of the great Judge, to call all Men to give Account *of the Things done in the Body*: And the Symptoms of approaching Death in many Instances force those to reflect on this certain Consequence of it, who had been before extremely inattentive to it, whether they then entertain a just Dread of it, or buoy themselves up with vain Hopes of Safety.

2. The Cry that the Bridegroom came, signified to the Virgins the Period of his Delay.

Hitherto he had delayed, till they had lost in Sleep the Thought and Expectation of his coming; but the Cry that he was coming, rouzed and acquainted them that he would tarry no longer. So shall the Almighty Judge at once make the slumbering World know, that the Day is come, of which his Word had before given them such solemn Notice, that there shall be no longer Delay, but that *the Wrath of God is come, and the Time of the Dead that they should be judged, and that he should give Reward unto his Servants the Prophets, and to the Saints, and them that fear his Name, small and great.* Then shall every one perceive that there's no more Time to sleep on, that they have the most solemn scenes imaginable before them; to stand before the great Tribunal, to have all their Actions pass under a most exact Survey, and to receive a correspondent Sentence, to eternal Happiness or eternal Misery.

The Languishing of Nature, the Failure of Medicines and of every Method of Relief, the growing Force of Disease, and the sensible Approaches of Death, in the same manner demonstrate, that the Coming of Christ in that View, shall be no longer delayed. Then those that have put the Thought of it as far as possible from them, are constrained, if the Use of Reason remains, to confess, that the Time is come which they have been so often warned of, that the Lord

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is at hand, and Judgment and all the invifible Realities of the World to come, which they have difregarded, are opening upon them. Then the flumbering Chriftian finds no more room for his unworthy Slumbers, which have done him fo great an Injury, but perceives himfelf, perhaps not without Fear of the Ifue, juft ready to appear before his Lord : Happy they, that have learnt fo great and fo constant a Mindfulness of his Coming, as to be effectually guarded againft any Degrees of Terrour when he comes. We proceed,

IV. To confider the Call attending the Notice of the Bridegroom's Approach, *Go ye out to meet him*; which plainly imports fuch Things as thefe : Go, congratulate his Nuptials --- pay him the Service he expects --- and partake of the Entertainment he has prepared. It implies,

1. A Direction to go and congratulate his Nuptials.

This might be juftly expected from his Friends, and efpecially from thofe that were come forth on purpofe to meet him. In like manner it may reasonably be expected, that the Friends of Chrift fhould rejoice, when he comes to receive all his Saints to a perfect and everlafting Union to himfelf; and every Token of his Approach will be a Call to give him a joyful Reception, to exult in the Display of his Glory, and to

join in the Pleasure of his own gracious Heart on that blessed Occasion.

But they that do not cordially love him cannot do it: they cannot say with the Apostle, Rev. i. 7. in the View of his coming with Clouds, "*even so, Amen.*" So let him "*come; my Soul longs for, and rejoices in*" "*the Expectation of his Appearance, and*" "*of all the glorious Events attending it.*"

On the contrary, they must join those *Kindreds of the Earth that shall wail because of him.* Go, Sinners, at the Coming of Christ, and welcome him if you can. No, you cannot rejoice in his Glory; you will have no relish for the Transports of that Day; it will be too alarming, too dreadful a Day to you; and will throw you into too great a Consternation to bid it welcome; you will shudder at it as a Day of immense Horrour to you, and wish to have it put off even for ever; but in vain: Christ comes, however unprepared you are to welcome his Appearance.

But it highly concerns the Servants of Christ to seek such a Temper of Mind, such Love to him, such Zeal and Watchfulness in his Service, such Expectation of his Coming, as may lay a Foundation for their meeting him with Pleasure, as certainly it becomes those to meet him that are under the highest Obligations to him, and that have the greatest Expectations

Expectations from him : but if our Love to him is cold, and our Zeal and Watchfulness in his Service languid, how shall we be able, when he says, *surely I come quickly*, to answer, *Amen, even so come Lord Jesus* * ?

2. The Call to go out to meet the Bridegroom, was an Order to go and pay him the Service he expected.

The Virgins that had taken their Lamps, were hereby summoned to attend and give light to the Bridegroom with them. Thus at the Coming of Christ, his Servants, though incapable of being in the least useful to him, will be called forth to wait upon him on that Occasion, and from thenceforwards to *serve him* in the most perfect manner, *Day and Night in his Temple for ever* †.

But Oh how unfit to receive such an Order, and how incapable of obeying it will they be found, who have been estranged from his Service upon Earth, who have never taken any Pleasure in it, nor loved him as their Lord and Master ; but on the contrary, have continued to the End to serve divers Lusts and Vanities ! We cannot serve him in his heavenly Kingdom, if we are Strangers to his Service upon Earth : and if we have served him at all, the more zealous, the more active, and the more spiritual we have been in his Service, so much the

* Rev. xxii. 20.

† Rev. vii. 15.

greater Joy will it be, to enter upon a State of perfect and eternal Service hereafter.

3. The Order to go out and meet the Bridegroom, implies an Invitation to partake of the Entertainment he had prepared.

The Virgins were hereby called, when they had performed the present Service that was expected of them, to go to the Marriage-Supper, and to partake of the Preparation the Bridegroom had made for his Friends. Thus the Servants of Christ at his coming, both at the general Judgment and at Death, are called to receive that, which Christ has purchased for them by his Blood, which he has promised them in his Word, and which he has given them the Earnest and Foretaste of, by his Spirit; to enter upon a State of compleat Holiness and Happiness, upon the perfect Enjoyment of God, upon *the Fulness of Joy, that is in his Presence, and the Rivers of Pleasure that are at his right Hand for evermore* *.

But the Soul that has had no Relish for spiritual Blessings, nor any hungering and thirsting after Righteousness in the present Life, cannot receive the Blessings he has prepared for his Servants then; and the more we have learnt to *savour the Things that are of God* †, to relish and long for Conformity to the Image of Christ, the Influences of his Spirit, and the Enjoyment of him,

* Psal. xvi. 11.

† Math. xvi. 23.

so much the more shall we be prepared for the Enjoyment of the eternal Blessings of his Love, and with so much the greater Delight shall we hear the Order, *Go ye out to meet him.*

It now only remains that we attend to some brief Improvement of this solemn Theme.

I. Let each of us frequently and seriously reflect upon this great Event, the future Coming of Christ.

If we desire to stand with Honour and Joy before him, it is evidently of the utmost Importance to take heed of forgetting his Appearance. In his Name I warn all that will not be persuaded to attend to it, that it will be a terrible Solemnity to them, in consequence of that Inattention to it: if Weeks, and Months, and Years pass one after another, with little or no Thought of Christ and of his Coming, or Preparation for it, your Confusion and Terrour when he comes must be absolutely without Excuse: you must own that you have deserved to be alarmed and terrified, beyond Measure and beyond Recovery, on that solemn Occasion. Bring then the Actions of your Lives, the Words of your Lips, and even the Temper of your Hearts to this Test before-hand; the Account that is to be given to the great Judge at his coming: ask yourselves frequently, How shall I stand before the Lord
at

at that important Day? Am I in a prepared State, and have I truly devoted myself to his Service? Am I in the Way of Preparation for his coming, doing his Work, watching against every thing displeasing to him, and studying to shew myself in all Things approved in his Sight? Is there any Object I wish for so earnestly, or pray for so fervently as this, that I may be altogether such as my Lord commands me to be? To look continually for his coming as near, and to live under the Influence of that Expectation, will be a blessed Preventive of that Amazement and Terrour, which must seize those at that solemn Day, that will not be persuaded to attend to it before.

2. Let the People of God earnestly seek, the clearest Evidence of their Interest in Christ, and their Relation to him.

If our Hope of Heaven is yet doubtful and uncertain, let us remember how melancholy and distressing it will be to have it so when our Lord calls: how entirely must it deprive us of the Pleasure of expecting him, and of the Triumph which many of his Servants have had when he has called them to his Presence! let us seriously inquire, where is the greatest Darkness upon our Evidence, and what is it that renders it most uncertain to us, whether we indeed belong to Christ. Is it past Guilt? let us then renew our Humiliation for it, and our earnest

Application to the *Blood of sprinkling* * for cleansing. Is it remaining Sinfulness? let us watch and pray so much the more earnestly, and have continual Recourse to the Strength and Grace of Christ, to give us more compleat Victory. *All Things are possible to him that believeth* †: there's no Corruption too hard to be conquered by the Power and Grace of Christ, and a lively Faith in him. Is it the Deadness and Formality of our Duties? let us earnestly seek to set ourselves in every Duty as in God's Presence, remembering that perhaps we may go from his Ordinances, or from our Knees at the Footstool of his Throne, to the Seat of his Judgment. And let us earnestly cry for *the Spirit of his Grace and Supplications* §, to teach us how to pray, and do every Duty aright, to raise our Minds to fervent Desire, Gratitude and Love to our Lord, that when he comes, we may hear his applauding Voice pronounce, *well done good and faithful Servants* ||.

* Heb. xii. 24. † Mark ix. 23. § Zech. xii. 10.
|| Matth. xxv. 21. 23.

S E R-



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S E R M O N VIII.

The Foolish Virgins trimming their Lamps.

M A T T H. XXV. 7.

Then all those Virgins arose, and trimmed their Lamps.

A Further Scene opens upon us in this Part of the Parable, and presents a lively Emblem of a Case which frequently occurs, in particular Instances at present, and may be expected to be general at the second coming of the Son of God. To that great Event, as we have already had Occasion to observe, our Lord appears immediately to refer; both as he speaks of the Reception or Exclusion, not of one only, but of many together, from the Marriage-Supper; and as he plainly treats of that solemn Day in the remaining Part of this Chapter: yet as the Day of Death will, with respect to each particular Person, be equally decisive with that of the general Judgment, much of what is said with

an immediate Reference to the one, may be properly applied to the other: and as frequent Opportunities offer themselves, of observing the Temper of Mind discovered in the former, which is probably the nearest, we are naturally led to fix our principal Attention here, and from thence to form our Ideas of what may be expected on the latter of these Occasions, which we consider as more remote, and which has not yet been seen.

The Words before us describe the Effect which the coming of Christ will have upon those, who sustain the several Characters of the foolish, and the wise Virgins, and the Alarm which it will give to both; to the former, as utterly unprepared for it, and to the latter, as having too generally slumbered and slept. Happy beyond Expression are the few, the very few who shall not be found sleeping; but whose *Loins are girded about, and their Lights burning, and they themselves like unto Men that wait for their Lord* *: But as the generality of Professors, both sincere and insincere, sleep in their Lord's Service, instead of diligently waiting and preparing for his coming, it can scarce fail of being alarming to both, as far as there is any Warning, and any Sensibility of Mind. Many indeed are so fatally secure, and to others the coming of Christ at Death is so sudden,

* Luke xii. 35, 36.

that,

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that, so far as can be observed, they never awake, till they open their astonished Eyes, upon the Majesty and Terroure of their Judge: but others are awakened by his Approach; and those that are so, whether sincere or false Professors of Religion, cannot but be concerned to be prepared to meet him, which is represented to us, by both the wise and foolish Virgins arising and trimming their Lamps, that they might give a clear Light, when the Bridegroom came: but the one wanted the most material Provision for trimming theirs; they had no Oil, and their Lamps were gone out: To what Purpose was it then to snuff, and otherwise prepare Lamps already gone out, and destitute of Oil to feed them, if an Attempt was made to light them again?

So ineffectual, as there is the utmost Reason to fear, will the poor Preparation be generally found, which those, who have rested in any thing short of saving Grace, to the last, may then endeavour to make, whatever Miracles of Mercy may be wrought in some extraordinary Cases. It may therefore have its important Use to take a View before, of the Sentiments we shall probably entertain according to our Characters, and the Degrees in which we have been sleeping in Christ's Service, and of the Exercises to which there is reason to believe, we shall in a manner necessarily be led, when we
apprehend

apprehend the coming of our Lord at hand, as far as we may then be capable of them. It is but a little Time that we have to pass over in our Thoughts, and consider in what Disposition we shall be found, when we are just ready to appear before the great Tribunal: Yet a few Days, or Years at most remain, before that which we are now called to imagine, will become a Reality; and is it difficult, or is it a Matter of little Importance now to call it to view? Or rather is it not easy to a Mind thoroughly concerned about its Salvation, and evidently a Part of the truest Wisdom, as it is adapted to prevent that Surprise and Confusion with which many are then seized? Though all these Virgins are represented as trimming their Lamps, it may be proper to consider them separately as thus engaged. Let us then,

I. Observe the foolish Virgins trimming theirs.

This naturally represents the Consternation which Sinners, both the openly profane, and the hypocritical Professors of Religion on some Occasions discover, when they apprehend Death approaching, and which probably will be nearly the same, at least in some Particulars, on the first Appearance of the great Judge, at the Day of Judgment; a kind of Specimen of which is also sometimes seen, in the Terror that seizes them under present awful Judgments: Their

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Consternation

Consternation sometimes at present does, and may be justly expected, on this great future Occasion, to discover itself in such Instances as these ---- in the Change of their Language ---- in their Confessions of Sin ---- in their Cries for Mercy ---- the Resolutions they form, if they may be spared ---- their Relish for religious Exercises ---- and their Readiness to lay hold on every Appearance of Hope.

1. The Sinner's Alarm, at the Approach of Death and Judgment, appears, in the different Language he then sometimes uses, from that to which he was before accustomed.

In the Gaiety of Youth, and Vigour of his Health, nothing was in general to be heard from his Lips, concerning God and the World to come, except extorted as an Answer to that which was spoken by others: his Language was, at best, empty and frothy; perhaps, false and deceitful, lascivious and debauched, full of vain Boasts of himself, rage against his Fellow-Creatures, or Blasphemy against God.

But when Death appears at Hand, either by decrepid Age, or the Force of threatening Disease, we sometimes hear Men speak a Language entirely new: the old profligate Sinner begins to speak, upon some Occasions, of that God, whom he had been before highly affronting; of the Vanity of the
World,

World, which had been the only Object of his Regard, and of entering on a World, which he had before totally neglected: and a Stranger to his former Conversation, and to the Effects, which Age and overwhelming Infirmities are capable of producing, might imagine him a Person of a very different Character: But what Effect, can the Wretch expect from a few good Words at last, whose Thoughts, Words, and Actions, have been one continued Scene of Rebellion against God, whose Heart continues unchanged, and who flees not, even then, in deep and sincere Contrition, to the Refuge of the Cross of Christ for Salvation? The threatening Afflictions of younger Life, while they continue, sometimes make a like Change in the Language, where there is none in the Heart: the Subjects of Conversation are strangely altered, or the Manner in which they are spoken of, if they had been sometimes occasionally mentioned: one would imagine that nothing lay so near the Heart, as the Concerns of the Soul; and that it was impossible, that Subjects, which seemed to be spoken of, with so great a Degree of Seriousness, could ever be forgotten and disrelished again, if Life is prolonged.

Were the Judgment of the Great Day to come less suddenly than we are taught to expect, it would probably produce a like Effect; and, perhaps, some alarming Symptoms

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toms of its Approach, which the Scriptures seem plainly to foretel, may do it, and make a great Change for the Time, in the Language of the vain, the proud, the blasphemous, and the scoffing Sinner.

2. The Alarm of Sinners, at the Apprehension of the Approach of Death and Judgment, appears in their Confessions of Sin.

While no Danger is seen, they go on securely, regardless of their Ways, and often bold in Sin; so far from being convinced of it, or discovering any Willingness to be so, that they can scarce bear to be reprov'd for it, even in the mildest Terms; and receive the Admonitions that are given them by the Friends of their Souls, with apparent Marks of Disrelish, if not with Resentment: Perhaps this is more frequently the Case with false Professors of Religion, than with other Sinners, whose Neglect of God, and habitual Wickedness, is more visible and undeniable: the most friendly Admonition, that points out any thing unbecoming their Profession, seems to intimate a Doubt of its Sincerity; and, as they are destitute of that Humility and Desire to know the worst of their own Case, which constitutes at once, so great a Part of the Christian Character, and so important a Means of maintaining it well; they are often ready to consider themselves as highly affronted by it.

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But when they apprehend themselves upon the Borders of an eternal World, except Conscience still continues asleep, Guilt stares them in the Face; the poor Excuses and Pretences they made, to keep themselves easy, and to stop the Mouths of those that warned them, appear in all their Fallacy, and vanish, like Smoke before the Wind: they tremble, under the Apprehensions of that Wrath, which they are conscious of having deserved, which seems just ready to fall upon them, and from which they have not sought an Escape, in the Way which the Gospel prescribes. In such Circumstances, they are ready to own, what Rebels against God they have been, and sometimes with their own Mouths, discover Guilt, that had till then been concealed: they are ready, of their own Accord, to acknowledge the Mis-improvement of their precious Time, and their Neglect and Disregard of the great Concerns of their Souls, with an Appearance of much Sorrow, and sometimes with many Tears: the unhappy Creatures are trimming their Lamps; but alas! they are Lamps without Oil, and without Light, like those of the foolish Virgins, which were gone out.

My Friends, will it be surprizing, if some of you, that will not be convinced of Sin, but seek some poor Pretences to shelter your Guilt now, should be rouzed from your fa-

tal Lethargy on a Death-Bed, alarmed at the Prospect of Eternity before you, and confessing your Guilt readily, and with great Concern? Be wise betimes, while God proclaims, *Prov. xxviii. 13. He that covereth his Sins, shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have Mercy.*

The like Effect to that of approaching Death, is also sometimes seen under alarming Judgments in Life; and thus it will probably be at the Day of Judgment, and thousands of Tongues be heard confessing their Guilt, that were utter Strangers to it before.

3. The Alarm of Sinners, at the Apprehension of approaching Death and Judgment, appears in their Cries for Mercy.

They can generally content themselves, while in Health, without Prayer, which I fear is to this Day the Case of some that hear me, notwithstanding the frequent Admonitions, that have been given upon that Head; or if they pray, it is without any earnest Solitude, to obtain the Blessings they ask: they see not their Need, at least in any strong and impressive Light, and their Prayers are cold, customary, formal, Shadows of Prayer, rather than the Substance of it.

But let Death appear at hand; let the Sinner apprehend himself just ready to appear before his Judge; and then, if he has any just Sense of his Danger, he will begin to pray

pray, and cry for Mercy with great Appearance of Earnestness: And probably he is indeed in earnest, so far as to dread the Wrath of God, that hangs over him, and to desire to escape from it; though not in earnest even then, to obtain spiritual Blessings, not thoroughly concerned to embrace an offered Saviour on his own Terms, to have his Nature sanctified, and his Soul filled with prevailing Love to God and Holiness: Yet he cries, like one perishing, for Salvation from the Ruin that hangs over him; he redoubles his Cries, like one that can take no Denial. Had he so cried and continued to cry before, for Mercy, not only to save him from Hell, but to turn him thoroughly to God, he would not have been rejected; nor indeed would his Cries even then be in vain, if they proceeded from a thorough Conviction of Sin, and a hearty Concern to be entirely subjected to the Gospel of Christ: But alas! there's reason to fear that they are commonly only the Effect of a present Fright; He cries; but if he is spared, we have seen, in too many sad Instances, he leaves off calling upon God again, as soon as the present Danger disappears, or relapses into a cold and indifferent manner of calling upon him: He desires, not in Earnest, an Acquaintance, and continued Converse with God; but is still willing to live estranged, and at a Distance from him: Thus it is said

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of the Hypocrite, *Job, xxvii. 10. Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?*

Such probably will be the Case with Sinners in general, at the Approach of the Lord Jesus Christ: The Multitudes that had refused to call upon him before, will then be seen in amazing Crowds, crying to their Judge for Mercy, with all the Bitterness and Anguish, that the opening Pit of Destruction can inspire: but they must expect to be silenced, by that tremendous Sentence, *Prov. i. 24--27. Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my Counsel, and would none of my Reproof: I also will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction cometh as a Whirlwind; when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you.* Oh that this may not be the deplorable Case of any among us, when the Judge comes to call us to his Tribunal, either at Death, or the great Day of his second Appearance.

4. The Alarm of Sinners, on the Apprehension of Death and Judgment at hand, appears in the Resolutions they form, if they may be spared a little longer.

In many Instances, they discover no Resolution to serve God, but on the contrary appear obstinate and determined in a Course
of

of Sin, while they have no Apprehension of any present Danger; nor are any Alarms, that the Word or Servants of God can give, sufficient to change that dreadful Bent of Mind. In other Instances, where there are some returning Convictions, they are accompanied with returning Resolutions against Sin, and for the Service of God; but the unhappy Creatures are *unstable as water, and therefore cannot excel* *: as soon as the present Impression is worn off, all their Resolutions are forgotten; and thus from time to time the Spirit of God is grieved and quenched, and the Sinner's Resolutions grow more and more faint, till he yields himself, without any further Resistance, the willing Captive of Sin and Satan.

But when the Wrath of God seems to hang over him, when Death and Judgment appear at hand, he frequently resolves with all the Appearance of Sincerity and Concern; he solemnly vows and promises that if God will then spare him, and try him a little longer, he will never do as he had done; he will forsake his Sins, and his sinful Company; he will turn to God, and make the Concerns of his Soul the great Object of his Attention, in Preference to every thing else.

But alas! how poor are these Resolutions, however solemn, and however strongly ex-

* Gen. xlix. 4.

pressed,

pressed, while the Heart is not changed, and yet retains a secret Love of Sin, though it trembles for the present at its Consequences; and a secret Aversion to Religion, though the apprehended Approach of the great Judge strikes a present Conviction into the Mind, of the Necessity of it! How poor are these Resolutions, while the Sinner goes out in his own Strength, not duly sensible of his Danger, and of his Need of Divine Grace, to assist and establish his Resolutions! And in consequence of so unhappy a State, if sparing Goodness is manifested to him, there is abundant Reason for the blessed God to say to him, as to *Ephraim* and *Judah*, *Hos. vi. 4.* *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your Goodness is as a morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it goeth away.* Or as in the *xi. Hos. 12.* *Ephraim compasseth me about with Lies, and the House of Israel with Deceit: his Vows are soon broken, and his Engagements to God soon forgotten; and if he is solemnly reminded of them, yet it is without Effect; the evil Spirit that seemed dispossessed, returns to his former Habitation, and in many Instances, takes to him seven other Spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last State of that Man is worse than the first*.*

* *Luke xi. 26.*

In like manner, perhaps some may be trying this vain Refuge, at the last Day, and promising Obedience if they may be yet spared: but it will then be for ever too late; the Judge will not descend from his Tribunal, till he has pronounced their dreadful and unchangeable Doom.

5. The Alarm of Sinners, when they apprehend Death and Judgment at hand, sometimes appears, in the Relish they then discover for religious Exercises.

While there is no Appearance of Danger, the Sinner is ready to say of the Worship of God, *what a Weariness is it, and to snuff at it*, to refer to *Mal. i. 13.* or like those Sinners, *Amos, viii. 5.* *When will the new Moon be gone, that we may sell Corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth Wheat? When will Duties and Ordinances be over, that we may return to our Employments or Pleasures? Holy time hangs heavy upon their Hands, and nothing is in common more insipid to them than holy Exercises: is it not what many among us have found, and may still find in themselves?*

But as soon as any Danger startles those that were before obdurate and insensible, there is a sudden and surprising Change seen; they are ready immediately to fly to the Exercises of Religion, as a Refuge from the Evils they fear. It is so in publick Calamities: when the Sword of Rebellion was drawn

drawn in our Land, our frequent worshipping Assemblies in this, and neighbouring Places, were diligently attended; and it was probably the same in more distant Places: every one that was concerned for the publick, or indeed for their own private Advantage, seemed convinced of the Necessity of calling upon God, and ready to engage in it; but it is melancholy to add, that as soon as the Danger was withdrawn to a greater Distance, even before it was over, our worshipping Assemblies grew thin: and the like Observations may be frequently made, in other threatening Dangers.

Thus, when Conscience is awakened, by the Apprehensions of Death at hand, scarce any thing seems to be relished, but Prayer, Reading, and spiritual Conversation, even by many, who before had no Regard for any such Things. Ministers or others in Reputation for Piety are sent for, their Prayers desired, and their Instructions and Counsels hearkened to, with Attention and Eagerness, in proportion to the Alarm Conscience has received: and perhaps there may be something similar to it, seen at the Day of Judgment, as far as the Solemnities of that Day will admit, or at least, amidst the alarming Signs of its Approach. Once more,

6. The Alarm of Sinners, on the apprehended Approach of Death and Judgment, discovers

discovers itself, in their Readiness to lay hold on every Appearance of Hope.

Those that before gave themselves no Thought or Concern about their Souls, or the World to come, when they seem just ready to enter upon it, begin, if Conscience is even then awake, to be convinced of the Necessity of some Ground of Hope. Conviction forces itself upon their Minds; and to shun the Terrours of it, they are ready to collect every thing possible to pacify their Consciences, and to give some present Hope; though alas! too frequently all that they do, or can lay hold on, is worthless as the feeblest things in Nature, according to that awful Word, *Job viii. 13, 14. So are the Paths of all that forget God, and the Hypocrite's Hope shall perish: whose Hope shall be cut off, and whose Trust shall be a Spider's Web.* And again, *Job xi. 20. But the Eyes of the Wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their Hope shall be as the giving up of the Ghost.*

The Sinner often flatters himself in the general Mercy of God, and in Christ's dying for Sinners; though without any Evidence of having cordially embraced that Mercy, fled to the Sacrifice of the Son of God, and bowed his Soul to his blessed Government. This flattering Hope seems to be much confirmed, if he has been free from gross and notorious Offences; he is not thoroughly convinced of Sin, and therefore overlooks
innumerable

innumerable Evils, which like certain Diseases appear less threatening than others, yet prey upon the Vitals of the Soul, and are the sure Presages of eternal Death, without the Application of that sovereign Remedy, which the Gospel proclaims : and though he cannot regard himself as absolutely pure, yet he endeavours to persuade himself, that the Pardon of these lesser Sins will be easily obtained. If he has maintained a fair Character among Men, or kept up a Profession of Religion, he endeavours to draw some Hope and Encouragement from thence ; and would persuade himself that God will not condemn one, whom Man has approved, and who has made such a Profession of Regard to Him. If he has had some Convictions, how entirely soever they have been lost, perhaps these become the Foundation of his Hope, and he flatters himself, that they were indeed Conversion ; and that all his wilful and allowed Course of Sin afterwards, was nothing more than Sins of Infirmary. Feeble as these Foundations of Hope are, they are the best on which he can build ; and as it is dreadful to leave the World without any Hope at all, he founds it on such insufficient Grounds as these : But may Almighty Mercy teach each of us to build our Hope in Life, upon a firmer Foundation, that we may have a firmer Foundation, to build it upon

upon in Death, and in the Approach of the Solemnities of the Judgment to come.

Having thus considered the Alarm of awakened Sinners, on the Apprehension of the Coming of Christ, to call them to Death or Judgment; before I proceed to consider that also, which is often seen in sincere Christians themselves, that have been sleeping over their Lord's Service, which I refer to another Discourse, I propose, as the Improvement of what has been now said, to point out a Way to Sinners, to guard against so fatal a Surprise, at the Coming of Christ: and Oh, that every one, who is yet in his Sins, might so hear, that his Soul might live; and a divine Power accompany the Counsel that is to be given, that it may become effectual to Salvation, and change the Terrour of Christ's Approach into present joyful Expectation, and a future cordial Welcome of it. Permit me then, solemnly to counsel and intreat you in the Name of the Lord ---- to cry earnestly to God, for his Spirit to be poured out upon you ---- immediately to forsake the Ways of Sin, and apply yourselves to the diligent Practice of every Duty ---- to seek to humble yourselves deeply before God for past Sins, and remaining Sinfulness ---- to do it with special Views to Christ ---- and to dread the Thought of resting in any thing short of a thorough Conversion to God.

I. Would

1. Would you escape a fatal Surprise at the Coming of Christ, cry earnestly to God for the Influences of his Spirit.

It was the Mark God gave *Ananias* of *Saul's* Conversion, *behold he prayeth* †; and there is the same Evidence in every Soul truly converted from Sin to God, so constantly found, that it has been sometimes not improperly said, that “Prayer is the very Breath of the New-Creature;” but the great Errand which Souls under the renewing Work of the Spirit of God, have to the Throne of Grace, is not only to obtain the Forgiveness of Sin, but the Effusion of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish all his gracious Work in them. There's then abundant Ground of Hope concerning the State of a Soul, when it begins to cry earnestly to God for his Spirit; and, blessed be his Name, there is the utmost Encouragement to ask so great a Blessing, in those gracious Words of the Lord Jesus, *Luke xi. 13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* and in *Prov. i. 23. Turn ye at my Reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, and make known my Words unto you.* Go then, as humble Suppliants, to the Throne of Grace, and plead these Promises for so inestimable a Blessing as the

† Acts ix. 11.

Holy

Holy Spirit, to be diffused upon you. It is the first Work of the blessed Spirit, to convince Men of Sin; if then you have any serious Thought and Concern about your Salvation, either now, or at any other Time, flee to the Throne of Grace, intreating, that this blessed Work may be wrought in you, to shew you your Sins of Heart and Life, and the Enormity and Danger of them, in so alarming a Light, as may lead you to Repentance unto Life, and effectually *warn you to flee from the Wrath to come* *. Do you find your Hearts hard and insensible? they are indeed so by Nature, as you are fallen Creatures, and have been more and more hardening, by the long Practice of Sin; but there is a gracious Promise of the Holy Spirit, for the awakened Soul to plead before God in such a Case, *Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. A new Heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony Heart out of your Flesh, and I will give you a Heart of Flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my Statutes, and ye shall keep my Judgments, and do them.* Has former Experience taught you to distrust your present Resolutions? cry for the blessed Spirit to confirm them, and *establish your Hearts with Grace* †; and as *there is no other Name given under Heaven among Men,*

* Matth. iii. 7.

† Heb. xiii. 9.

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whereby we must be saved †, than that of the Lord Jesus, intreat the Influence of the Spirit, to lead you from all Dependance on yourselves, to Christ, as the Fountain of Righteousness, to justify you, and Strength to assist you, in all the Conflicts and Duties of the Christian Life : it is the Office of the blessed Spirit, and that for which he was promised, *to receive of Christ's, and shew it unto us, that we may glorify him, John xvi.*

14. Pray that this blessed Work may be wrought in you, that you may so see your Need of Christ, and that God would so *reveal his Son in you* ‖, that you may truly receive him, and love him with the utmost Fervency. You will also continually need the Assistance of the blessed Spirit, to enable you to cleave to Christ, and follow him with your whole Hearts, through the several Scenes of Life afterwards : implore his gracious Influence therefore, with the utmost Earnestness and Constancy, to begin, and carry on a Work of saving Grace in your Hearts, and to consummate it at last, in eternal Glory.

2. Would you escape a fatal Surprise, at the Coming of Christ, immediately forsake the Ways of Sin, and apply yourselves to the diligent Practice of every Duty.

It was the Counsel, which Daniel gave to Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 27. *Where-*

† Acts iv. 12.

‖ Gal. i. 16.

fore, O King, let my Counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy Sins by Righteousness, and thine Iniquities, by shewing Mercy to the Poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy Tranquillity. It is to no Purpose to pray, and to be determined at the same time to go on in Sin; or indeed, to be undetermined whether to forsake it or not: it would be but a solemn Mockery of God; nor could your Petitions to be turned from it be earnest or sincere, in so sad a Temper of Mind. Dread the least Return to your former evil Ways; for Sin will harden your Hearts afresh, and more and more quench the Spirit. Be afraid of offering the least Violence to your Consciences, by doing any thing, for which they may secretly reproach you. Watch against every thing that has been, or might be an Occasion of Sin; for those that will play with Satan's Baits, can scarce fail of becoming his easy Prey. Shun the Company of Sinners, those Tempters upon Earth, those Agents for the great Destroyer; and chuse, and seek the Company of the People of God. *He that walketh with wise Men, shall be wise: but a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed* *.

Apply yourselves to a diligent Attendance upon the Ordinances of God, to the Study of his Word, Meditation upon it, and the daily and conscientious Practice of Prayer,

* Prov. xiii. 20.

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both in your secret Retirements, and with your Families, if you have such. Every Act of Duty, carefully performed, will be both a great Engagement to Stedfastness in Religion, and a great Help towards it: but at the same time, remember the indispensable Necessity, of *laying hold on God's Strength, that you may make Peace with him* †; your own will be found far too weak, and Satan will easily prevail against your best Resolutions, if you go not out in the Strength of the Lord, making mention of his Righteousness, and of his only ‡.

3. Think seriously of your Sins, and earnestly seek deep Humiliation for them.

A few slight Thoughts of Sin, or even an alarming Sense of its Evil and Danger, will probably wear off, without any Effect, if you are not concerned to fix your Thoughts upon it, and often return to the Review of its Evil and malignant Nature, and the Aggravations that have attended it; and though, as has been before observed, it is the Office of the blessed Spirit to convince of Sin, and his gracious Influence must be earnestly sought, for that Purpose; yet it is an important Means, to bring a Soul to a thorough Sense of it, seriously to reflect upon it, and attend to those alarming, humbling Views, in which it is represented in the Gospel, and which the Abundance of divine Good-

† Isa xxvii. 5.

‡ Psal. lxxi. 16.

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 ness to you, gives you of it: thus the Psalmist says, *Psal. cxix. 59. I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies.* Let me therefore earnestly intreat you, to set apart some Time frequently, to look back upon the past Sins of your Life, and to take a View of the past and present Sinfulness of your Hearts and Natures: reflect upon the Multitudes of your Transgressions, and observe how they exceed all Account: Review the Sins of your Childhood, Youth, and riper Years; your Sins of Omission, and of Commission; against God, and your Fellow-Creatures, in your several Relations to them, and Concerns with them; and contrary to that Restraint, under which it was your Interest, and Duty to have kept your own Appetites and Passions; and you must surely see Reason to say with the Psalmist, *Psal. xxxviii. 4. Mine Iniquities are gone over my Head; as a heavy Burden, too heavy for me.* Reflect upon the Heinousness of their Nature, and the several Aggravations with which they have been attended; your religious Advantages, the Admonitions you have had from the Word, Providences, and servants of God; the Checks of your own Consciences, and the *Strivings of the Spirit of God**; the innumerable Mercies you have received, and the Purposes you have formed; and if you can take a serious

* Gen. vi. 3.

Review of these things, without your Hearts aching for Sin, they must be hard indeed! And let these Reflections upon your Sins, be attended with solemn Humiliation before God; go to the Footstool of his Throne, confess before him the Greatness, and the Multitudes of your Iniquities, and earnestly intreat his pardoning, and healing Mercy.

4. Flee to the atoning Sacrifice, and prevailing Intercession of the Son of God, as your only Refuge from the Guilt of Sin.

A Sight of Sin, in its own true Light, without a Sight of a Saviour, would fill the Mind with the utmost Terrour and Despair; and this seems to have been the Case of those unhappy Creatures, who have sunk under an overwhelming Sense of their own Guilt, and dreadful Expectations of deserved Vengeance: an awakened Conscience has presented to their View, the Multitude and Enormity of their Crimes, and they have not been directed, by those about them, to an all-sufficient, and most gracious Saviour, as their Refuge; or have been prevented, by the Subtilty of Satan, from that believing Application to him, which could not have failed, under the Conduct of the blessed Spirit, to have produced the most effectual Relief: But it is the Design of the Gospel and its Ministers, while they shew Men the Guilt and Demerit of their Transgressions,

gressions, as a necessary Step to their Salvation, to lead them to that Saviour, who *delivers us from the Wrath to come* *. Come then, under all the Burden of Guilt you find upon your Consciences, and all the Terrours it gives you, to Jesus, who bears this illustrious Name, because he *should save his People from their Sins* †: *His Blood cleanses us from all Sin* ‡: there is no Stain too deep to be washed out by it; the greatest, the most numerous Offences, shall not ruin the Soul, that has recourse to his Cross. He is also in another View, *able to save to the uttermost, them that come unto God by him, because he ever lives to make Intercession for them* ||. *He is a Priest upon his Throne* §, and *appears in the Presence of God* **, under the gracious Character of a prevailing Advocate, for every humble Penitent, that ventures his eternal Safety upon the Virtue of his Blood, and the Prevalence of his Intercession; and he is equally willing, as he is able to save, and has assured us, *John vi. 37. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* Come then, to the Footstool of his Throne; plead the Agonies he endured, and the Account which his Word gives, of the Design of them; plead the Encouragement it affords you to come to him, and the gracious Employment, in

* 1 Theff. i. 10. † Matth. i. 21. ‡ 1 John i. 7.
|| Heb. vii. 25. § Zech. vi. 13. ** Heb. ix. 24.

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which, it acquaints you that, he is now engaged above, in behalf of poor returning Rebels : He will not, he cannot deny the humble Suppliant. Whom did he ever deny in the Days of his Flesh, that came to him for the Cure of the Maladies of their Bodies ? and yet that was but the subordinate View of his Coming ; this, the grand supreme Design of it, to heal and save lost Souls. Once more,

5. Be afraid of resting in any thing less, than a thorough Conversion from Sin to God.

It is possible to have some serious Thoughts and Impressions, some good Purposes and Resolutions, and yet the Heart remain unchanged, and unsanctified ; you may in part reform your Conduct, apply yourselves to several Duties, and, like *Herod*, on the preaching of *John Baptist*, do many things*, and yet, like him, remain the Slaves of some beloved Lust, which will effectually exclude you from Heaven ; and perhaps prevail, as in that wretched Prince, to lead you, after promising Appearances, to the grossest Iniquities. You may have some Sense of Sin, and some Thoughts of Christ as a Saviour from it, and yet not be thoroughly turned from the one, or embrace the other. Remember then, those solemn Declarations of the Lord Jesus, *Matt. xviii. 3. Except ye*

* Mark vi. 20.

be converted; and become as little Children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; and, John iii. 3. Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God; together with that of the Apostle, 2 Cor. v. 17. Therefore, if any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. After these, and other like solemn Decisions of the Word of God, there's little or no Room, to form any stedfast Hope, concerning the State of a Person that discovers some present serious Thoughts, till he appears thoroughly convinced of the Necessity of this divine Change, and earnestly concerned to experience it in himself. Fear therefore, resting in any thing short of it; lest, after all, you partake of the Ruin, into which there's Reason to fear many fall, by satisfying themselves with some present Convictions, and partial Reformation.

S E R M O N IX.

The Wise VIRGINS trimming their
Lamps.

M A T T H. XXV. 7.

*Then all those Virgins arose, and trimmed their
Lamps.*

WE have seen, in the foregoing Discourses, a Spectacle worthy to be lamented; the wise Virgins flumbering with the foolish, and the latter, in the last Discourse, awakened by the Cry of the Bridegroom's Approach, and trimming their exhausted Lamps; but in vain, as they were destitute of Oil, and incapable of giving Light, after all their fruitless Endeavours. We are now to see,

II. The wise Virgins awaking also from their Slumbers, and trimming their Lamps, or preparing for the Bridegroom's Coming; with great Advantage, indeed, over their Companions, as having taken Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps; yet not without some Degree of Surprise and Confusion, in consequence of their Sleep.

The Preparation they made for the Bridegroom's Coming, is indeed highly fit in itself, and becoming so important an Event; yet there's Reason to regret that it was not more thoroughly made before, and that the genuine Friends of Christ, the blessed Bridegroom, should so far forget the Object they have in View, as to meet his Approach at Death, so generally not without some Alarm; perhaps not without some Uncertainty and Fear of the Issue of it; and so seldom with that cordial Welcome, with that sacred Transport of Love and Joy, which the Coming of such a Friend, and for so gracious a Purpose, demands. And there is Reason to believe, both from what we see of the prevailing Temper of fallen Man, and from the Accounts of the Word of God, that the sudden and majestic Appearance of Christ at last, will give the like Alarm to many at least, even of the wise Virgins,

Virgins, that had been slumbering and sleeping.

The Concern, that awakes in the Souls of the Saints, to be prepared for the Coming of Christ by Death, when they apprehend it at hand, appears in such things as these ---- In their solemn Examination of themselves ---- in their renewed Acts of Humiliation and Faith ---- in their Solicitude to get the most spiritual Temper of Mind ---- and in their Endeavours to spend their last Breath in the Service of Christ, and of Souls.

1. The Apprehension of the Coming of Christ, as at hand, excites his Servants to solemn Self-Examination.

A sincere Christian indeed, cannot have lived in an entire Neglect of this important Employment: They, that are thoroughly concerned for the Salvation of their Souls, and to obtain the Happiness of the World to come, will, as a necessary Consequence of it, frequently examine themselves. But in Proportion to the Degree, in which we slumber, in our Lord's Service, this important Work must be either neglected, or superficially performed. The Apprehension of his Coming, as just at hand, can scarce fail of awakening his Servants to renew their Inquiries with the utmost Concern. "Are
" my Hopes indeed founded upon the Rock
" of Ages? Are my Evidences for Heaven,
" such

“ such as will bear the Test of that uner-
“ ring Scrutiny they must undergo? Have I
“ been thoroughly turned from Sin to God,
“ or have I only taken the Lamp of Pro-
“ fession, without an inward Principle of
“ Grace? Have I given up myself, without
“ Reserve, to Christ, and been solicitous
“ to be faithful to my Engagements to him?
“ Are my Experiences such as may be de-
“ pended upon, to be the genuine Work
“ of the Holy Spirit? Have I had a sincere
“ and prevailing Concern to serve and please
“ God in every thing, walked watchfully
“ before his blessed Majesty, and been stu-
“ dious to shew myself approved unto him,
“ in Thought, Word, and Deed?” The
Work of Self-Examination is of Great Im-
portance at all Times; but we shall have
need of it especially, in the Approaches of
Death; and the more it has been neglected,
or carelessly performed, in Health, the more
Doubt, there is Reason to expect, will at-
tend it, if we have Opportunity for it, un-
der the Apprehension of the near Approach
of the great Judge.

2. The Coming of Christ, when it ap-
pears to be at hand, puts his Servants upon
renewed Acts of Humiliation and Faith.

While we sleep in the Service of Christ,
our Humiliation will be lamentably faint,
and our Acts of Faith few and languid: And
is there not Reason to fear, from the great
Defects

Defects of them hitherto, in some of us, that to review them, when we appear to ourselves just upon the Borders of Eternity, will afford nothing better than Hope and Comfort equally defective? But that solemn Scene awakens slumbering Saints, to prostrate themselves in deep Abasement, at the Footstool of their Lord, with renewed Shame, for their Departures from him, and their Remissness, and Negligence in his Service. The Thought of standing before so holy a Tribunal as his, so greatly impresses them, in many Instances, if they have the Use of Reason on that Occasion, that they think they cannot sufficiently humble themselves before him: *Sin* appears more *exceeding sinful* *, than almost at any Time before; and they are greatly solicitous, that there may be no Defects in their Repentance, that it may indeed be sincere and deep, and no Guilt remain upon their Consciences. For this Purpose they will look a-fresh to *the Blood of Sprinkling* † for their Pardon, and direct the Eye of Faith to the great and blessed Sacrifice, which God has appointed to take away Sin. They are ready to fear, lest their former Acts of Faith should have been defective, and will therefore solemnly renew them then, and be solicitous to look unto Jesus, if possible, more particularly and affectionately than ever.

* Rom. vii. 13.

† Heb. xii. 24.

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Some of us, I am persuaded, have already known the peculiar solemnity with which these Duties have required to be attended, when we have apprehended ourselves just upon the Borders of an eternal World: How solemnly have we then been renewing our Repentance, and our Views to a crucified Mediator! When the Hour of our Dissolution is really at hand, we shall probably return to this important Employment with equal Solemnity; and it will be highly fit that we should, if Opportunity is given. But let us continually remember, that the more we abound in them at present, the greater Satisfaction and Comfort there is Reason to hope we shall have in them, in our departing Hours.

3. The Apprehension of the Coming of Christ, naturally awakens his Servants to seek the most spiritual Temper of Heart.

To be carnally minded is Death; but to be spiritually minded, is Life and Peace *. It is therefore so desirable, to meet our Lord in the most spiritual Disposition of Mind, that the Apprehension of his Approach, almost necessarily excites some peculiar Concern to be found in it then. The View of that great Solemnity at hand, generally strikes the Mind in a far greater Degree, than in any common Circumstance, with a Sense of the Excellence of such a Disposition, and

* Rom. viii. 6.

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with the Sinfulness and Shame of having no more carefully maintained it before.

Then will a Child of God labour to be particular, solemn, and devout, in his Addresses to God; the Sense that he has of his own Sinfulness, of the omniscient Eye of God, and of the Majesty and Holiness of that Tribunal, before which he apprehends himself about to appear, will revive with special Force, and teach him to cry to God, as far as the Weakness of expiring Nature will admit, with more than usual Importunity, and with peculiarly ardent Ejaculations, that *his Soul may be bound up in the Bundle of Life, with the Lord his God**, and that he may find Mercy of him in that Day †.

The Lord Jesus Christ will then appear desirable and lovely to the utmost, especially in proportion to the Evidence the Soul has of its Interest in him; as all its Hope of the Pardon of Sin, of Acceptance before God, and of eternal Life, is founded upon his blessed Sacrifice, his prevalent Intercession, and the sovereign Dominion he has in the World of Glory. Nor can there be a more happy Frame of Mind to die in, than with a Heart full of Love to Christ.

Then will the holy Soul be particularly solicitous to lay hold on the Promises of God, for its Support and Comfort: How inexpress-

* 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

† 2 Tim. i. 18.

sibly desirable is an Interest in them, some blessed Evidence of it, and some sensible Experience of their Power and Sweetness in a dying Hour! A divine Promise sealed to the Soul by the Spirit of God, has abundant Sweetness in it at all Times; but at such a Season, it is a Cordial indeed, an Antidote against the Terrours of Death, and so effectual that it enables the Believer to triumph over that last Enemy.

Then, as far as Grace is in proper Exercise, will the Saints be ready to acknowledge with the highest Gratitude, the Abundance of divine Goodness to them, through the several Scenes of Life. Thus dying *Jacob*, *Gen.* *xlvi.* 15, 16. solemnly adores the God before whom his Father *Abraham* and *Isaac* did walk, the God who had fed him all his Life long unto that Day, and the Angel of the Covenant who had redeemed him from all Evil. *Joshua*, in like manner, when he was going the Way of all the Earth, calls *Israel* to witness, *Josh.* *xxiii.* 14. That not one Thing had failed of all the good Things which the Lord their God spake concerning them, in which he himself had been a Partaker with them; that all was come to pass unto them, and not one Thing had failed; which he repeats in the next Verse, thus dwelling with holy Gratitude upon the Goodness and Faithfulness of God. And this is the Temper in which a Christian would rejoice to bid adieu to Mortality,

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talities, admiring the abundant Mercy of God, and thankfully acknowledging how faithfully his Promises have been fulfilled to him, in the Way to his Kingdom; as a becoming return for the Display of those glorious Attributes, the Goodness and Faithfulness of God; an Engagement to others to serve him; an Encouragement to himself to trust in him, for the Fulfilment of the Promise of eternal Life; and a proper Transition from the Services of this mortal State to the Praises of Heaven.

A Child of God, apprehensive of the speedy Coming of Christ, will, as far as Reason, and with it Grace, is in due Exercise, endeavour to look forwards into the invisible World, and seek to form an Acquaintance before-hand with its Exercises and Entertainments, by such Inquiries as these, “How shall I exist? How shall I be employed in that new and glorious State on which I am entering? What will my Companions be, and what my Entertainments?”

He will be ready to take a solemn Farewell of the World, as a Wilderness, a Prison, a State of Sin and Sorrow, Conflicts and Dangers, from which he is about to be released, and commit his Soul with all possible Seriousness into the Hands of God, as our great Lord himself did, saying, *Luke xxiii. 46. Father, into thy Hands I commend*

my Spirit. Thus may the Grace of God enable each of us to die, when his Providence shall call us to it; thus glorifying God, and going with holy Triumph to his Kingdom. And who knows whether we are not now meditating on these Words, as it were for the Funeral of some among us, just at hand?

4. The Apprehension of the Coming of Christ as near, may be expected to awaken his Servants to spend their last Breath, in the Service of Christ and of Souls.

Thus *Jacob* died blessing his Sons, *Gen.* xlix. and set a Pattern to others of God's dying Servants, tho' destitute of the prophetic Spirit with which he was endowed. The whole Book of *Deuteronomy* perhaps, may be considered as the dying Charge of *Moses* to *Israel*, in which with a divine Pathos, and the utmost Force and Energy, he warns them of the tremendous Consequences of Sin, and shews them the unspeakable Excellence and Advantage of the Service of God: and his Charge to *Joshua*, Chap. xxxi. the excellent Song he dictated in the next Chapter, and his blessing the Children of *Israel*, Chap. xxxiii. are remarkable Examples of this Nature.

Thus have many others of God's Servants died: Even those that had before been unhappily slumbering and sleeping, have then sometimes awaked with much concern for

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the Good of others, and solemnly warned them of the Folly, Guilt, and Danger of such a Temper into which they themselves had fallen. But those that have been more happily wakeful and active, have with great Advantage often pathetically recommended with their dying Breath, the Service of Christ to others, and the unspeakable Advantage of Diligence and Fervency in it. It has been frequently an Opportunity of most important Instruction, to attend the Death-Beds of the People of God: How solemn their Words! How weighty their Counsels! How ardent their Concern to leave a Savour of Religion upon the Minds of Survivors! and, How urgent their Intreaties to those about them, to close savingly with Christ, and to follow him fully! Some of us have attended such instructive and affecting, such awakening and quickening Scenes; and God grant that the dying Counsels of those, who were so soon to speak no more, may not rise in Judgment against us to condemn us, but on the contrary, produce so happy an Effect, that we also may die with the like Temper, recommending Religion to all that surround us, from our own Experience, and especially, from our Experience of its Power to support and cheer us in that solemn Hour!

What Heart does not say, *let me die the Death of the Righteous, and let my last End be*

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be like his *? And who of us, my Brethren, does not wish to meet the Approach of the blessed Bridegroom, thus trimming our Lamps to receive him, which indeed we shall have need of, however watchful and diligent we have been before, and especially, if Life has been in a great Measure slept away. But to meet him without Fear, and with the pleasing Raptures of Souls ready to be received into all the Nearness of a nuptial Union to him, 'tis highly important to be making diligent Preparation for it beforehand, and as it were trimming our Lamps every Day.

As the Improvement, therefore, of this Part of the Subject also, I would point out a Method to my Christian Brethren, which I desire conscientiously and diligently to pursue myself, in order to our meeting our great Lord at his Coming, with the most sacred Composure and highest Satisfaction and Delight: and may the blessed Spirit teach and quicken each of us so to pursue it, that it may be effectual to this great End, and that we may be able to say, in our expiring Hours, and at the Appearance of our Judge at last, with the Apostle, 2 *Tim.* iv. 7, 8. *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the*

* Numb. xxiii. 10.

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Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. The Method, therefore, which I would point out, consists in such things as these ---- Much Examination of our Hearts and Ways ---- Watching against every thing that would pollute our Consciences --- Frequent believing Applications to the Lord Jesus Christ ---- Daily Diligence and Spirituality in Duty --- Careful Improvement of our Time --- Disengagement of the Heart from this World ---- Abounding in Gratitude, Praise and Love --- And, looking much for the Coming of Christ.

1. The first Advice I offer, is to apply yourselves now to that which constitutes one great Part of the Preparation of the Saints for the Coming of Christ, when they apprehend it at hand; that is, Self-examination with respect to your Hearts and Ways.

To be in doubt as to our eternal State, will naturally make us fearful of the Coming of Christ, lest it should be to our Confusion and Condemnation; and indeed, it is chiefly from hence that the Reluctance arises, with which the Coming of Christ is often thought of, even by the Saints themselves. If the great Question remains not fully cleared up, whether we are in Christ, and whether he will come as our Saviour and Friend, at Death and Judgment, there's

no Room to wonder, if we think of it with Dread instead of Desire. But a frequent careful Examination of our own Hearts by the Word of God, with earnest Cries for Grace to preserve us from a Mistake, will have a happy Tendency to bring this important Question to an Issue.

If there is indeed, a Mistake in our Hopes for Eternity, such an Examination can scarce fail of pointing it out; Conscience will speak, if its Voice may be heard; and it is the Foundation of the fatal Errour of the Multitudes that are mistaken, that they will not hearken to its Voice; they deceive themselves, because they will do so, and shut their Eyes against the Light which Conscience and the Word of God would give them; or if they cannot wholly exclude it, and avoid a Conviction of their Danger and Misery, yet they flatter themselves that it is not so great as in Reality it is, and that they shall yet have Time to escape, tho', at the same Time, they continue to neglect the Method of Escape.

If on the other hand, after many serious Inquiries, there appears upon the whole, notwithstanding unallowed Infirmities, Reason to hope and believe that we have experienced a divine Change; that it is the Study and Business of our Lives *so to walk as to please God**; and that there is no

* 1 Theff. iv. 1.

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known Sin in which we live, nor any known Duty we neglect; there is the utmost Ground for holy Confidence in God, according to the Apostle's Words, *1 John: iii. 21* Beloved, if our Hearts condemn us not, then have the confidence towards God. And such a misgiving Thought as this, arising at Times in our Minds, "What if I should be mistaken at last," ought to have no other Regard paid to it, than to make us the more watchful that we may not: for the faithful Saviour has pronounced, and blessed be his Name for so gracious a Word, *John viii. 12* He that followeth me shall not walk in Darkness, but shall have the Light of Life; which most certainly implies that such a Soul shall not be finally disappointed. And indeed such an Examination of ourselves, frequently repeated, and attended with earnest Prayer, and great Dread of a Mistake, does of itself afford one great Evidence of our Sincerity, since the Word of God has declared, *Prov. xxviii. 14*. Happy is the Man that feareth always: while on the other hand, as it is there added, *He that hardeneth his Heart shall fall into Mischief**. Careful Examinations of our own Hearts will have a further Advantage, besides furnishing a considerable Evidence of our Sincerity. They will shew us where the Evi-

dence

ndence of our eternal Safety is most dark and doubtful, and consequently, where there needs the greatest Watchfulness, and the most earnest Prayer; of what Sins we are most in Danger, and what Duties are most carelessly and remissly performed. And thus, such Examinations of ourselves, if they don't afford a present satisfactory Answer to the important Question, Whether we belong to Jesus, have their great Use to point out what is wanting to our compleat Satisfaction, and shew how to attain greater Measures of it. Nor can I help thinking, that to write an Account of the Result of such Inquiries, and review it frequently, might be of some special Service, as it would afford something to have recourse to, in an Hour of Darkness and Temptation, and at the same time serve as a Memento to the Soul, where its greatest Danger was perceived, and where the greatest Watchfulness and Diligence is needed.

But besides an Examination of our *Hearts*, with respect to our eternal State, it is highly important to examine our *Ways*, which will also be an important Means to our Safety and Comfort; such is the divine Command, *Hag. i. 5.* and again, *Ver. 7.* *Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your Ways.* And such was the blessed and highly advantageous Practice of the Psalmist, *Psal. cxix. 59, 60. I thought on*

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my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments. Perhaps there is a great and frequent Fault in Believers, in this respect; if we are concerned to know what is our State for Eternity, yet do we not too much confine our Thoughts to this, without inquiring with sufficient Care, “Do I walk worthy of my Profession?” and is not this one principal Cause, that we obtain no greater Satisfaction on the former Inquiry? Let us ask ourselves then in a Variety of Particulars, “How are my religious Duties performed? spiritually and affectionately, or coldly and formally? Am I watchful, well to discharge my social and relative Duties? Have I well learnt the great Gospel-Duty of Self-Denial? Do I well govern my Passions and my Tongue? Do I maintain a daily Care to think, and speak, and act, and fill up my Time as God would have me, and to be in every thing exemplary? Do I conscientiously manage my worldly Affairs with Integrity and Faithfulness, and in a Manner honourable to Religion? and, Do I maintain a becoming Superiority of Heart to this World, and a Heavenly Temper of Mind?”

I only add further under this Head; Let us always remember our Need of *the Witness* of

of the Spirit of God*, without which Satan will be able to puzzle the plainest Case, and cloud the clearest Evidence: Let us earnestly pray for it, and dread nothing so much as *grieving the Spirit of God* †, in any Respect. But this leads me to add,

2. Watchfulness against every thing that would pollute our Consciences, is another important Step towards meeting our Lord with Comfort.

No Method we can take will be effectual to produce a chearful Hope and Satisfaction towards God, upon good and sure Grounds, without this: Sin does, and will wound the Conscience; and whether those wounds are more or less felt at present, the Effect of them must be felt sooner or later, and will probably be found, at least, in keeping us in Uncertainty with respect to our Interest in Christ, and in making his Approach alarming to us; and indeed to be easy and confident, without maintaining a Course of holy Watchfulness against Sin, is a most threatening Symptom, either of Hypocrisy, or of a Conscience in a very sleepy State. Our Examinations of ourselves, if we enter into such at all, must either be very slight, or mistaken, or must leave Room for great Doubt, if not attended with a correspondent Watchfulness, and daily *Exercise, to main-*

* Rom. viii. 16.

† Eph. iv. 30.

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tain a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men. †.

As Self-Examination will point out where our greatest Danger lies, so there must our greatest Watchfulness be employed, if we desire to taste the Sweetness of the Approbation of Conscience, and have any reasonable Grounds to hope to obtain the Approbation of our Lord, and meet him with Comfort. *The Sin that most easily besets us* ||, that prevails most frequently, and finds most Excuses to shelter itself, is the most dangerous Enemy of our Souls, against which there needs special Care and Watchfulness. And if we would know whether we grow in Grace §, it is necessary especially to observe whether we gain any real, and lasting Advantage against this in particular. It was an abundant and glorious Cause of rejoicing to the Apostle, 2 Cor. i. 12. *to have the Testimony of his Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God he had had his Conversation in the World, and more abundantly to them to whom he wrote.* When we can thus appeal to the Eye of God and Conscience, and to those around us, that we have had our Conversation, in such a Manner as this, it will greatly conduce to our meeting the Lord with Pleasure and Transport. Most important, to this Purpose, are

† Acts xxiv. 16. || Heb. xii. 1. § 2 Pet. iii. 18.

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his frequent Counsels and Commands to watch; particularly, *Matt. xxvi. 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation:* and *Mark xiii. 33. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the Time is:* and again, *Luke xxi. 34. Take heed to yourselves, lest at any Time your Hearts be overcharged with Surfeiting, and Drunkenness, and Cares of this Life, and so that Day come upon you unawares.* The Guilt of Sin will probably revive, with peculiar Anguish to the Conscience, on a Death-Bed, and hinder the Confidence and Pleasure, with which it is highly desirable to meet our Lord, if we are not solicitous to maintain a continual and universal Watchfulness against it.

3. Frequently applying to the Lord Jesus Christ, is another important Method to meet him with Comfort, at his Coming.

It is certain that we have, in innumerable Instances, broken the Commands of God, and made most unworthy Returns for the Riches of his Grace; by which we have laid a Foundation for painful Reflections in the solemn Hours of Death, and deserved the most tremendous Vengeance of the great Judge. It is impossible, therefore, to stand before him as innocent Creatures; on the contrary, we must appear in his Presence as great Offenders; and not only past Guilt, but remaining Sinfulness gives Occasion for
Fear,

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Fear, at the Thought of standing before so penetrating and so spotless a Judge; and after all our Watchfulness, there will yet be so many Defects, and so many Evils found in us, that, were it not for the Sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, there would be no Room for Hope; but blessed be God for the gracious Declaration of his Word, *1 John i. 7. The Blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all Sin.*

To this glorious Atonement must the returning Sinner flee; and this also is the Believer's only Refuge, the purifying atoning Virtue of the Blood of Jesus. Would we then meet our great Lord with Comfort at his Coming; it is of great Importance that we should be often looking to his blessed Sacrifice, and, as it were, laying our polluted Souls at the Foot of his Cross, to be purified by the holy Streams that flowed from his dying Heart: Our Sins must be often penitently confessed, with particular Views to his Blood, as the only Way of our Pardon and Acceptance. It is unspeakably desirable, thus to die as Penitents, *looking to him whom we have pierced**, for our Pardon, Healing, and Salvation; and it will happily contribute to the Comfort of that important Hour, if we have learnt *through Grace †*, to abound in the sacred Exercises of Repentance and Faith, in Life and Health.

* Zech. xii. 10.

† Acts xviii. 27.

It greatly Concerns both our Safety and Comfort in Death, that no Guilt should then remain upon our Consciences; and that not only with respect to greater Degrees of Guilt, but the Guilt also of more common Infirmities; the Pardon of these also is to be expected no other Way, than by the Blood of Jesus, believed and trusted in for that Purpose. The more frequent and solemn we are in Acts of Faith in Christ, as our Sacrifice and Intercessor, so much the more watchful will it make us against repeating our Guilt, and so much the more contribute to our holy Confidence in him at his Coming.

We have need also of frequent Applications to Christ, for the Acceptance of our religious Duties, which are too full of Sin to admit of any Confidence in them, and for Strength and Grace to assist us to watch against Sin, and enable us to do our Lord's Will, and walk becomingly before him; in order to our honourable and joyful Appearance in his Presence, to which nothing will more effectually contribute, than to have learnt to live much upon him, and conversed much with him.

4. Daily Diligence and Spirituality in our Duties, is another happy Means to meet our Lord with Comfort.

It is of great Importance to our meeting him with Pleasure, that our Work should be done,

done, as far as he has given Opportunity for it; that we may not have Occasion to charge ourselves, or be charged by our Judge, as unfaithful or negligent Servants; and that we be found engaged in his Work when he comes; thus our Lord says, *Luke xii. 43. Blessed is that Servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.* And it is a most important Admonition, *Eccl. ix. 10. Whatsoever thy Hand findeth to do, do it with all thy Might; for there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom, in the Grave, whither thou goest.*

The common Duties of Life, and those which we owe to our Fellow-Creatures, require diligent and constant Attention; and Negligence therein may be reasonably expected, to lie heavy upon our Consciences in a dying Hour.

The immediate Duties of Religion demand the utmost Diligence and Constancy. It is especially our Wisdom and Duty to pray much; and if we have not Opportunity for more than the usual Seasons of solemn Addresses to God, yet we ought to be frequently lifting up our Hearts to him by devout Ejaculations, by which we may in a great Measure *pray always* †. But Spirituality in Duty is also highly important: a cold formal State of Mind in it, will do nothing towards our meeting our Lord with Com-

† Eph. vi. 18.

fort ; but on the contrary tend, in Proportion to the Degree and Duration of it, to make us fearful of his Appearance ; as having trifled much in his Presence, and had our Hearts but little engaged to approach him. But when we come to God with holy Awe and ardent Desire, when we pour out our Supplications importunately, and praise him with fervent Gratitude ; in a Word, when we are enabled to worship him as the living and true God ; such Duties have the highest Tendency to secure the Comfort of our meeting him at last ; and I am persuaded, that upon many Occasions, when the Christian has been taught thus to worship God, it would be little or no Surprise, should he be removed from kneeling at the Footstool of the Throne of Grace, to the great Tribunal.

The other Duties of Religion too, such as reading and meditating on the Word of God, conversing concerning him, attending his Ordinances, and labouring to do good to others, with all the various Branches of Worship and Duty we owe to our great Lord, when seriously and spiritually attended, will greatly conduce to the Comfort of our Appearance before him.

5. A careful Improvement of our Time, has also its great Use to the same important End.

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Thus

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Thus the Apostle directs, *Eph. v. 16. Redeeming the Time, because the Days are evil;* and *Col. iv. 5. Walk in Wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the Time;* that is, while on the one hand, you avoid every thing morose and offensive in your Conduct to unconverted Sinners, take care on the other, not to waste your Time, by spending it with them unnecessarily, and when you can have no Hope of doing them any Good by it. How light a Matter soever many make of squandering away their Time, it is a precious and most important Talent, to be accounted for, when we come to appear before our great Lord; and the Loss of it has, with the utmost Reason, sat heavy on the Consciences of many, in their dying Hours.

Would we avoid so distressing a Case, let us carefully improve our Time, while we have it; and, for this Purpose, be often and seriously inquiring, “What would God have me to do in this and the other Part of it? How shall I fill up the Hours of one Day after another, so as to be most pleasing and acceptable in the Eyes of the Lord, and to give up my Account to him *with Joy, and not with Grief?*” We must indeed for this Purpose, often deny our own Inclinations; but the Advantage of it will be an abundant over-balance for the Pain of such Self-Denial, and the Pleasure of reviewing Time spent in a manner, which Conscience

ence shall approve, as most agreeable to the Will of God, greater than can be easily apprehended. There will then be no Room to regret it as lost, or tremble at its Approaching Period; but, on the contrary, Ground to expect it with Pleasure, as that which will issue in our Lord's high Approbation.

6. Disengagement of the Heart from the World, is another important Means to meet our Lord with Comfort.

The Love of this World betrays us into a Variety of Snares, keeps our Hearts much from God, spoils and profanes Multitudes of our religious Duties, and greatly tends to render the Coming of Christ an Object of Reluctance, rather than joyful Expectation: For a Heart fixed on this World, cannot think with Ease and Pleasure of bidding an everlasting Adieu to it. But if, on the contrary, while on the one hand we relish the Enjoyments, and do the Duties of it, we have learnt on the other, much of its Vanity; if our Affections are raised above it, if we are diligently preparing to take our Leave of it, seeking our Rest and Pleasure from a better World, and fixing our Hearts there; it will be a blessed Means to assist us, to think of taking our Leave of all things seen and temporal, with Desire instead of Fear, to wait for the Coming of our Lord with Pleasure, and to meet him with entire

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Satisfaction and Composure, and indeed with sacred Delight and Transport.

7. Abounding in Gratitude, Praise, and Love, will have a further glorious Effect to the same End.

This is the very Temper of Heaven, and the blessed Employment of the holy Hosts above: the more therefore we imbibe of their Spirit, in this Respect, and the more we learn of their Work, with so much the greater Satisfaction and Pleasure may we reflect upon joining their illustrious Assembly, and being there engaged in this blessed Work to Eternity, in a more perfect manner than we ever can be upon Earth. A Soul diligently observing divine Goodness, recording the tender Mercies of the Lord, frequently reviewing them, and offering its grateful Acknowledgments for them, will easily perceive abundant Cause to do it: and I am sure, that every one that tries the blessed Experiment, will find it a most delightful Employment. It will afford the strongest Evidence of a Title to Heaven: A Soul habituated to the blessed Work of Praise, abounding in it, and bringing forth its genuine Fruits, has no Room for one uneasy Thought, at the Apprehension of Christ's Approach, and indeed, can scarce have any; but, on the contrary, will generally think of it with Pleasure, in this particular View, that the Imperfection of its
Praise

Praise will then be done away, and that it shall be for ever employed in a far nobler manner than this mortal State would admit, in that Work in which it had tasted so much Sweetness here: Nor is there any thing that will give a higher and more delightful Idea of the heavenly World, than to learn much Gratitude and Praise at present. To enter thus into the Temper of Heaven before we arrive there, to abound in Love to our blessed Father and Redeemer, and with it, in Compassion and Benevolence to Mankind in general, and Love to our Christian Brethren in particular, will therefore have its abundant Use, to teach us to look for the Coming of Christ with unspeakable Delight, when we shall be swallowed up in Love to him, and all the holy Assembly that worship before his Throne.

If then, my Brethren, you would thus meet your Lord with Pleasure at his Coming; let your waking Moments in the Morning be consecrated to his Praise, blessing him for the Mercies of the Night, and rejoicing to think with what Delight you shall awake from Death, in the glorious Morning of the Resurrection. Bless him in the several Scenes of the Day, for the Mercies that may be constantly observed. Bless him when you compose yourselves to the Rest of the Night, for the manifold Instances of his Goodness in the Day, for so powerful

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a Restorative after its Fatigues, as Sleep. and for the delightful Hope of sleeping in Jesus when you die. Bless him when you converse with his Word, for its holy Directions, for its sacred Precepts, for its reviving Promises, and for the glorious Prospect it presents. Bless him for the Gift of his Son, that inestimable Mercy, bestowed upon fallen Man, for the Righteousness he has wrought out, and the perfect Salvation he has purchased. Bless him for the Work of his Grace on your Hearts; and when you see others around you estranged from him, and rebelling against him, adore him as those that owe it only *to his Grace, that you are what you are* ||. Bless him for every Preservation from Temptation, for every Exercise of Grace, for every Motion of his Spirit on your Hearts, for the Hope of his gracious and fatherly Care, through the several Scenes of Life, of Victory over Death, and Admittance to his Kingdom; and with this sacred Temper towards the blessed God, be solicitous also to abound in Love to Mankind, especially *to those of the Household of Faith* †, and be ready to shew it on every Occasion, in your Forbearance, and Readiness to forgive and do Good.

8. Looking much for the Coming of Christ, is another important Method to be observed, to meet him with Comfort.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 10.

† Gal. vi. 10.

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The more we learn to familiarize this great Event to our Minds, the more abundant Ground shall we have to expect to meet it without Surprise, and with the utmost Chearfulness and Delight. The Gospel frequently reminds us, that our Lord is coming, and that his Coming is near; but the Heart of Man forgets it, puts far off the Thought of it, and is engrossed with other Objects of the present transitory Life; hence it is, that when we think of the Coming of Christ, it is so generally with a kind of secret Wish, that it may not be very near, with respect to ourselves, instead of that ardent Desire and chearful Hope of it, which we should learn, by looking much for it, dwelling upon the blessed Theme, and contemplating, from Day to Day, these great Subjects, Death, the Grave, the invisible World, Eternity, the Glory which Christ has prepared for his Servants, and the Judgment he will shortly come to execute. Such Themes as these, if the Mind was daily conversant with them, would have a happy Tendency to quicken and habituate us to Diligence, in our Preparation for the Coming of our Lord; and in consequence of it, to teach us to say, with dying *Jacob*, when our Lord comes, "*We have waited for thy Salvation, O Lord**; it has been the great Object we have had in View,

* Gen. xlix. 18.

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“ on which we have fixed our Hope, which
“ we have been solicitous to pursue, and
“ from which we have derived our greatest
“ Comforts, and most pleasing Prospects.”
Most gracious Promises are made to such a
Disposition as this, particularly, *Heb. ix. 28.*
Unto them that look for him, shall he appear
the second Time, without Sin, unto Salvation.
May the Grace of Christ imprint the Pro-
mise on each of our Hearts, and teach us so
to walk before him, that when he comes,
we may give him the most cordial welcome,
as our best and dearest Friend.

S E R M O N X.

The foolish Virgins in Distress, applying in vain to the wife.

M A T T H. XXV. 8, 9.

And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your Oil, for our Lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

WE have been lately considering the Surprise and Alarm, which the Coming of Christ may be expected to give, and often does in fact give, both to enlightened Sinners, and to slumbering Saints, represented in the Verse immediately before the Text, by the Virgins, both the wise and foolish, rising and trimming their Lamps, when the Cry was made, *Behold the Bridegroom cometh*; with a View of preventing a
 Surprise,

Surprise, so fatal to the one, and so grievous to the other. For this Purpose, I have offered some important Counsels to both; earnestly entreating Sinners, to cry to God for the Influences of his Spirit; immediately to forsake the Ways of Sin, and apply themselves to the diligent Practice of every Duty: to think seriously of their Sins, and seek deep Humiliation for them; to flee to the atoning Sacrifice, and prevailing Intercession of the Son of God, as their only Refuge; and to be afraid of resting in any thing less than a thorough Conversion from Sin to God: and recommending to Believers much Examination of their Hearts and Ways; Watchfulness against every thing that would pollute their Consciences; frequent Applications to the Lord Jesus Christ; daily Diligence and Spirituality in their Duty; careful Improvement of their Time; Disengagement of the Heart from this World; abounding in Gratitude, Praise, and Love; and looking much for the Coming of Christ, as important Methods to meet his Approach with Comfort.

We see in the Words now before us, the fatal Consequence of the Folly of Sinners, and insincere Professors of Religion in particular, opening itself, in the vain Suit of the foolish Virgins in Distress, to the wise. What else indeed, but Distress, could be expected to be the Consequence of their Folly? and whence

whence could it be relieved, when the Bridegroom was coming without any further Delay, or without giving Room for the Provision of Oil for their useless Lamps? The wise Virgins could not supply them, they had only enough for themselves; and they could not be supplied by those that sold, because there was no Time left to apply to them for it. Such will be the Distress, such the vain Cries of awakened Sinners for Relief, when they stand upon the Verge of Eternity, or receive their Summons to attend the great Tribunal. My Friends, the awful View highly concerns you; it is the Picture of your own Distress, and the Representation of your vain Cries for Relief to the Saints, if you are guilty of the immense Folly of resting in any thing short of renewing Grace, and the vital *Power of Godliness* *. The Things now to be offered, are designed as an Admonition, to shun so dreadful a Case, while there is Opportunity; and I pray God, that it may not be without Effect! Observe then, the deplorable Case of hypocritical Professors, when Christ comes ---- the desirable Light, in which the Case of real Saints will appear at that Day ---- the Application of Sinners to them for Relief ---- the bare Sufficiency of the Grace of the best of Saints for themselves ---- their Inability to afford any effectual Relief to

* 2 Tim. iii. 5.

others ---- and the best Service they can do them, by giving them important Counsel. Let us observe,

I. The deplorable Case of hypocritical Professors, when Christ comes.

Their Lamps are gone out : Nor is it surprising, that they should, when they are scarce maintained to that important Day. Prevailing Corruptions and Temptations, and especially the Difficulties sometimes to be encountered in the Ways of Religion, often extinguish them long before : this our Lord represents to us under another Metaphor, *Matt. xiii. 20, 21. But he that received the Seed into stony Places, the same is he that beareth the Word, and anon with Joy receiveth it : Yet hath he not Root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when Tribulation or Persecution ariseth, because of the Word, by and by he is offended.* Were there no Temptations to be withstood, nor any Difficulties to be surmounted, or, were the Lord Jesus to come presently, perhaps the Profession of the Hypocrite might endure till he came ; but as he often calls his Servants to a long and difficult Warfare, and delays his coming by Death for many Years, and his second glorious Appearance for many Ages, the Hypocrite knows not how to wait so long, and can scarce hold out in his Profession to the End.

But,

But, supposing that Christ should come soon, and the Hypocrite's Profession, such as it is, should be maintained to that Day; then the Phantom vanishes, without having answered the great Ends of a Profession of Religion, to lay a firm Foundation for Comfort in Death, and to prepare the Soul to exchange the Exercises of it here, for the nobler Services of Heaven: it does not merely languish for a Time, as the Exercise of Grace in real Christians sometimes does; but absolutely dies, instead of issuing in the more glorious Light of Heaven, and dies to revive no more.

Perhaps the Lamps of the Foolish Virgins might hold out till just as the Bridegroom was coming; for so might the original Words be translated, as in the Margin of our Bibles, *our Lamps are going out*, and thus they expire, in a Manner, before the Bridegroom's own Eyes. So will the vain Profession of the Hypocrite die, at the Approach of the Lord Jesus: His all-penetrating Eyes discover its Fallacy now, and will be the immediate and unerring Witnesses of its total and eternal Extinction. The Solemnity of his Coming by Death, and the Glory of his second Appearance will have an Effect upon it, which the Approach of the Bridegroom could not have upon the Lamps of the foolish Virgins; it will extinguish all its vain Lustre, as the rising
I Light

Light of the Morning dissipates and extinguishes those luminous Vapours, that are sometimes seen in the Night: Nothing but what is true and genuine, can stand the solemn Test of his Appearance.

The wise Virgins might see the Lamps of the foolish gone, or going out. Thus the Saints are often mournful Witnesses, of the Extinction of that Profession of Hypocrites in Life and Health, which they had once seen fair and splendid: At other Times, they see Reason to fear, from the Inconsistency they had before observed in it, that it expires in Death, and that there is Room to apply Solomon's Observation, *Eccl. viii. 10.*

And so I saw the Wicked buried, who had come and gone from the Place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the City where they had so done: this also is Vanity. Their Profession itself was too great a Vanity, to make it be remembered with Honour by the Saints; and the obstinate Vanity of the Minds of others, of a like Character, prevents their remembering it for their own Warning. But, however cautious the Saints may be of judging, and however willing to entertain the most favourable Hope, that the nature of the Case will admit; the great Judge, at his second Coming, will cause both them, and all others, to discern between the Righteous and the Wicked; between him
that

that serveth God, and him that serveth him not *.

The Hypocrite's own Conviction of the Vanity of his Profession, is not delayed till that great Day ; perhaps even before Death, Conscience may awake, and his own Lips begin to confess and bewail his Misery ; at least, as soon as the departing Spirit has taken its Flight, it will be terribly convinced, and the Sinner be obliged to perceive, how vain were his Pretences to others, and his Flattery of himself, while he was yet the Slave of Sin ; how vain that hearing, and praying, and talking about the things of God, in which the Heart was not engaged, and which had no Effect upon his Temper and Conduct ; and oh ! with what Anguish and Confusion must he then acknowledge, " My Lamp is gone out ; my Name for Religion lost ; my secret Guilt discovered ; and my vain amusing Hopes and Imaginations vanished." The great Tribunal at last must produce Multitudes of such bitter Cries, but fruitless, as that Profession of Religion, which gave Occasion for them. Remember, O my Friends, and, may my own Soul remember, with perpetual Awe, that the Lamp of Profession, which has not the Oil of the Sanctuary to feed it, will go out, at furthest, at the Coming of Christ ; and those Tongues, that had been accus-

* Mal. iii. 18.

ed to cry, Lord, Lord, without an inward Principle of Reverence and Duty to Christ, be obliged with overwhelming Shame and Horreur, to acknowledge it. We observe here,

2. The desirable Light in which the Case of real Saints will appear to Sinners and hypocritical Professors, at the Coming of Christ.

The foolish Virgins, however sanguine they might be before, were convinced, when the Cry was made, *Behold, the Bridegroom comes*, how much more prudent a Part the wise Virgins had acted, and in how much better a Case they were than themselves, and wished too late for the like Provision that they had made.

The profane Sinner not only neglects, but even despises and scoffs at the vital *Power of Godliness*, and the Exactness and Circumspection in Behaviour to which it leads; and the Hypocrite, amidst his *Forms of Godliness* †, can content himself without it. But the Day of Death and Judgment will shew, in a most convincing Light, that *the Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour*, and in a Case unspeakably more happy. It will destroy the Sinner's Value for those things in which he once prided himself, and create an Esteem for those things which he once slighted and disregarded. The En-

† 2 Tim. iii. 5.

joyments of this World, a distinguished Appearance, and the Applause of Men, which he once admired and eagerly pursued, will then appear little Things, gaudy Toys, contemptible, and to him pernicious Vanities, as these were the Baits which the Tempter used, to make him his Prey: contemptible Vanities indeed, when they are vanishing for ever, and leaving their Votary without any real and abiding Advantage. But true and genuine Religion, will appear the highest Wisdom and the greatest Happiness: then will the Sinner earnestly wish, to be in the Case of the People of God, pardoned, accepted, approved of God, and admitted to the Glory of his heavenly Kingdom. The Death of the righteous is an Object, which an enlightened Conscience often teaches Men to desire, how far soever they are estranged from the Temper and Character of the righteous in Life: and especially to desire it, when Death and Judgment appear to be at hand: the near View of these great Solemnities forces a Conviction upon the Mind, that the poorest, meanest, and most despised Christian is in a Condition unspeakably better, than the greatest Riches or Reputation among Men can possibly give: and Oh how gladly would the self-convicted Sinner, exchange his Condition, if possible, however advantageous it appeared before, with that of a humble Christian, little observed and

little known, when he apprehends himself just ready to appear before his Judge.

Learn then, my dear Hearers, to judge now as Death and Judgment, and as even probably the Approach of them will teach you to judge: think seriously how much better the Case of a poor Believer in Jesus Christ is, amidst all his Straits and Poverty, even though great Afflictions and Contempt are added to them, than your own, if destitute of real Religion; though your worldly Circumstances should be much more plentiful; though you pass through Life in ever so much Ease; though you may be treated with the greatest Tokens of Regard by your Fellow-Creatures; and though you have a Name for Religion itself. Observe,

3. The Application of Sinners in Distress, to the Saints for Relief, represented in the Request of the foolish Virgins to the wise, *give us of your Oil.*

We see something answerable to this Conduct of the foolish Virgins, upon many Occasions at present, when the Consciences of Sinners are roused by the Apprehension of a speedy Appearance before their Judge: they that before shunned the Company, and disrelished the Conversation of the Saints, then desire it in preference to all other, and find no Satisfaction in the Company of Sinners, nor in the vain or worldly Conversation for which alone they had a Relish before.

fore. How frequently is it seen, that Men desire other Company around their Beds of Sickness or Death, than they before desired, and other kind of Conversation than that in which they had before taken Pleasure: they then often desire the Prayers of the Saints, who had no relish for Prayer before, and hope for that in consequence of them, which they would not before ask for themselves: they are then often ready to hearken to those whom they apprehend to be the People of God, as being convinced that if any in the World can do them any important Service, these must be the Persons; and by the eager Attention they sometimes shew, they seem in Effect to say, "Oh save us from
" the Destruction that hovers over us; com-
" municate to us some of your Blessedness;
" lead us into the same happy State that
" you are in:" They seem even to flatter themselves that it may be so, and that they may become the Children of God themselves, by this late Application to those that are so, and be at once fitted for a Place in their future blissful Abode: though seldom even then, heartily willing to have the Wounds of Conscience laid open, and the first Step taken necessary to lead them to Salvation, their Sin and Misery represented in its own true Light, to awaken them to flee to him, who alone can save them *from*

*the Wrath to come** : Yet they seem to wish, and are ready to hope, that the People of God that converse with them on those awful Occasions, will speak some Comfort to them ; when alas, the Foundation for Comfort is at least so doubtful, that the faithful Friends of their Souls are afraid to administer it, lest they should *heal their Hurt slightly*†, and quiet that Conscience which is not yet sufficiently alarmed.

Perhaps this will be the Case, with some of you on your Death-Beds ; and perhaps you will be ready to hope for that Blessing, by means of the Prayers and Conversation of the Saints in those alarming Hours, which they can by no means persuade you now to seek : perhaps you will be ready to expect them to encourage that Hope, and speak that Comfort to you, which you will then need : but remember that it is indispensably necessary, that there should be a previous Foundation laid for it, before the Friends of your Souls can do it ; and, if they cannot see that there is, they will think it necessary, however harsh it may seem, to lead you to a deeper Conviction of your Sin and Danger ; and it would be but helping you forward so much the more easily and quietly to Destruction, to cry Peace, peace, without this.

* 1 Thess. i. 10.

† Jer. vi. 14. viii. 11

What

What we see something of upon such melancholy Occasions at present, will perhaps in part take place at the Appearance of Christ, to judge the World: perhaps Sinners will be ready to cry to the Saints to intercede with their great Lord for them; and in the Wildness of their Consternation imagine, that they might possibly do something for them, to save them from impending Vengeance: perhaps, as some have conjectured, they will be ready to hang about them, when they see them beginning to ascend, *to meet the Lord in the Air**, and cry to them to take them with them: perhaps the wicked Children of pious Parents will be ready to do so to them, or wicked Hearers to their Ministers, that once laboured for their Salvation; but alas, it will be utterly in vain. Observe again,

4. The bare Sufficiency of the Grace of the best Saints for themselves, intimated in the Answer of the wise Virgins, Not so; *lest there be not enough for us and you.*

The righteous themselves are scarcely saved, to refer to, 1 Peter iv. 18. or saved with difficulty, though certainly saved: 'tis through many Conflicts and hard Struggles, after many Fears and sad Apprehensions in general, lest they should come short of it, and with much Sinfulness cleaving to them, till their Salvation is perfected in their Savi-

* 1 Theff. iv. 17.

our's Kingdom: *they are but unprofitable Servants, and have at best done no more than it was their Duty to do*, and indeed even that in a very imperfect Manner: they have therefore no Merits of their own, on which to found a Claim to eternal Happiness, but must be wholly saved by the infinitely meritorious Sacrifice of the Son of God: from whence it evidently follows, that they can have no Merits to communicate to others, as the Church of Rome idly dreams; a Doctrine, of the Falseness of which, this Parable alone would afford a very strong Presumption, if not a conclusive Proof. I add,

5. That the Saints will be utterly incapable of affording any effectual Relief to Sinners, at the Coming of Christ.

Religion is a personal Thing; and the most important Benefits of it are wholly confined to the Saints themselves, and incapable of being communicated. Others may indeed receive some present Blessings on their Account: For their Sake the World stands, and for their Sake Judgments are often averted from a sinful Land; but the best and most important Benefits of Religion, are such as none can receive, but those that are truly religious: An Interest in the Promises of God, a Part in his fatherly Love, and a Title to his heavenly Kingdom, belong to none but the Saints themselves; and the

* Luke xvii. 10.

nearest

nearest Relation of others to them, or the Place they may have in their tenderest Affections, can give them no Interest in these great things, except they themselves also embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and bow to the Sceptre of his Government. Thus it is said, *Prov. ix. 12. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.* This important Truth is represented in a solemn Light, *Ezek. xviii. 5, 13.* where the Blessings of Life and Happiness are promised to the Righteous, with this express Declaration annexed, That if he beget a Son who walks not in his Father's Ways, but in Ways just the Reverse, *he shall not live, his Blood shall be upon his own Head.* And to the like Purpose is the Baptist's Admonition to the Jews, *Matt. iii. 9. Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these Stones to raise up Children to Abraham.* And it deserves particular Attention, that the rich Man in our Lord's Parable, when he *lifted up his Eyes in Hell*, cried to Abraham, as a Father, *Father Abraham, have Mercy on me**; but Abraham's Faith could not save an unbelieving and disobedient Descendant; nor shall the most eminent Piety and exemplary Zeal of God's dearest Children, be able to save those whom they once loved most, that are

* Luke xvi. 23, 24.

estranged from so blessed a Character : and at Death and the final Judgment, that Word shall be fulfilled with most awful Propriety, *Ezek. xiv. 14, 18.* spoken originally concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem, *Though these three Men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither Sons nor Daughters, they only shall be delivered.*

When we see those that have lived in Forgetfulness of God, and Rebellion against him, upon the Brink of an everlasting World, in dreadful Expectations of their speedy Appearance before their Judge, and of the Vengeance that awaits them, and lamenting, in bitterest Anguish, their Guilt and Misery; it is indeed a most pitiable Spectacle; the Hearts of the People of God cannot but melt with tender Concern upon such Occasions; but it is not in their Power to change the Nature of the Gospel Terms of Salvation, to renew and sanctify the Heart that has been totally estranged from God, or to release the Soul that his Vengeance is seizing; and at the great Day of Account, the best of God's Servants will be utterly unable to relieve those that are found in the Number of his Enemies: they must receive Salvation with thankful Admiration of the Grace that bestows it upon themselves, and humbly acquiesce in that Justice, which shall

shall then be executed upon those that have neglected it. Observe once more,

6. The best Service the Saints can do to Sinners, in Extremity, is by giving them important Counsel.

The wise Virgins directed the foolish, *go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves*; though they could by no Means give them any Assurance, that the Bridegroom would not actually come in the mean time. Thus, when the People of God attend the Beds of the Sickness and Death of Sinners, they may, and will be ready to direct them, to the most important Methods of Relief, in their deplorable Condition, pressing them to reflect upon their Iniquities, and humble themselves before God on that Account; pointing out the atoning Blood of the Son of God, by which alone the Guilt of Sin can be taken away; and exhorting them to lift up their Hearts to God with incessant Ardour, for pardoning and saving Mercy, and for the Effusion of his Spirit upon them, to lead them to Christ, and to renew and sanctify their Hearts.

But when the best Counsel is offered in such Cases, with what Doubt and Uncertainty must it be offered! we know indeed, that if the Sinner truly embraces Jesus Christ, though *at the eleventh Hour*, he shall assuredly obtain Mercy; but how doubtful is it, whether the Impressions that he appears
to

to be under, are any thing more than the Effect of a present Fright; whether he is not yet the same wretched Captive of Sin and Satan as ever; and whether, after all the Counsel that can be given him, divine Justice may not speedily cut him off, before he has an Opportunity of putting any Part of it in Practice, however willing, he may at present appear, to do so! We may add our Prayers for him to our Counsels, but with what Doubt, whether those Prayers will be of real Advantage to him, or whether they will not return into our own Bosom, without any other Effect!

Such things as these present themselves to our Attention in the Words before us; and that they may not be in vain to us, let us further attend to the important Improvement of them.

1. How solemn a Warning does this Part of our Lord's Parable give to the Acquaintance, the Relatives, and the Children of the People of God, that are yet Strangers to the Power of Religion.

I address those first, that stand in no nearer Relation to the People of God, than that of Acquaintance, and Friends, and perhaps Worshipers together with them. I am confident I may answer for all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, about you, that that they love your Souls too, and are sincerely concerned to see how little Regard
you

you have to your eternal Safety and Welfare. Yes, our unhappy Friends, we pity you in the inmost Recesses of our Souls, and lament that we cannot hitherto prevail to do you any more important Service, and that there is Reason to fear that the Day is at hand, when we shall be able to do you none in your greatest Extremity and Distress: We acknowledge, with Gratitude to God and you, all the Humanity and Friendship you shew us; and rejoice, both for ourselves and you, that you are preserved from discovering that Malignity against us, or others of the Servants of God, which many have shewn, in that State which we fear you are in, and perhaps you also are pleased with our Friendship: But we long to be able to do you the most valuable Office of Friendship, to rescue you from Ruin, and to lead you to everlasting Salvation, while an Opportunity offers itself to escape from the former, and to lay hold on the latter; but we cannot hope for it, if you will not believe and attend to the Word of God, that warns you of your future deplorable Case, if you should be found destitute of an inward Principle of Grace, when the great Judge shall summon you to his Tribunal: How vain will it then be, to wish, in the Bitterness of your distracted Souls, that you had minded Religion in Truth, or that you could partake of the Happiness of those that have!

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How little End can it answer, to apply in the last Extremity, to the Ministers you have heard, and who have so often warned you without Effect, or to the Christians among whom you have lived, and with whom you have conversed, and paid that external Worship, which has indeed been the whole that you have paid! How little End, in the Approach of the great Solemnity of your Appearance before God! and how absolutely vain will it be, when that great Solemnity actually comes! Must we then see those, among whom we have spent so many Years of Friendship and Comfort, die, without being able to help them, in the Hour of their Distress and Terrour? Must we shortly see them divided at the great Day, to the right and to the left Hand of the great Judge, and acquiesce in that Wisdom and Justice, that assigns them their several Stations there? or rather, must you, O Neighbours, Friends, Fellow-Worshippers, see yourselves separated from those with whom you have stood in so long a Connection, without any Possibility of receiving the least Assistance from them? and shall not the Prospect of it alarm you, now to flee from its future insupportable Terrours?

But in what stronger, and more tender Terms, shall I address you, ye Husbands, Wives, Brothers, Sisters, Children, or other

near

near Relatives of the People of God, who are not such yourselves? how shall we bear to see you die out of Christ, and, perhaps, in great Terrour on that Account? how shall we bear the Thought of the Improbability, that our Counsels and Prayers, offered in your dying Hours, should turn to any real Advantage to you, when those we have offered in your Health have been ineffectual? or should we see you die insensible of your Misery, that will render the Case yet more hopeless and overwhelming. And, oh! how will you bear it, to be torn from the Partners of your Flesh and Blood, and the affectionate Friends of your Souls, with this dreadful Thought, that you have withstood all the Attempts they had made for your everlasting Good, and that the Separation that is then taking place, must be eternal? will you then intreat their Prayers, and hearken to their Advice, in your last Hours? Surely your Consciences are too much enlightened, by your Connection with the People of God at present, to depend upon any great Effects, from what they can then do for you. How feeble must every Ray of Hope be! how doubtful, how improbable, even in your own Views, that you should obtain that Salvation which you have so long slighted! But at the Judgment Seat of Christ, 'tis impossible, that we should do you the least Service. Must we then see our Families them-

themselves divided? Must we behold the Distress, the Anguish, the Horror, the Despair of those that were once dear to us as our own Souls, without being able to administer the least Relief? Must you see those to whom you stood in the tenderest Relations, and from whom you received a thousand Marks of endeared Affection, the Spectators of your Shame and your Ruin, and even Witnesses against you? O ye dear Parts of ourselves, shall not such a Prospect move you, now to flee to that Almighty Saviour, as Penitents, as Suppliants for his Mercy, who alone can stand you in any Stead then? O Almighty Saviour, let thine own Arm bring Salvation now, rescue them from so dreadful a Case, and remove the present distressing Fears of thy Servants concerning them.

Secondly, How greatly should the View we have taken, quicken the People of God, to labour for the Salvation of those about them?

If we belong to God, we certainly cannot think of the eternal Ruin of the Souls of others, without Grief; to be unconcerned about it, would have a very threatening Aspect upon our own eternal Safety; and an affectionate Solitude for the Salvation of our Fellow-Creatures, will be a considerable Evidence of the Certainty of our own. But we know, that when our Lord comes, we can

can do them no important Service; we cannot change the State in which they are found, nor oppose the Sentence of his Justice upon his Enemies; but, on the contrary, shall be fully convinced of the unerring Equity and Wisdom of it. Our Counsels to them, or our Intercession for them would then be too late, and probably will in fact be too late, when they are just ready to appear before him. Now, while the Judge delays his Coming, we have Opportunity of doing something for their Souls; and, if we are zealous and active in his Service, we have Encouragement to hope, that we may be the honoured Instruments of leading them to a joyful Appearance before him hereafter. *Whatsoever therefore our Hand finds to do, let us do it with all our Might**; let us industriously labour to lead our perishing Fellow-Creatures, as far as our Influence extends, to Christ and Salvation; for surely it may be reasonably expected, to abate the Honour and Joy of our own Appearance before him, even if we should, upon the whole, be approved as his genuine Servants, to meet those in Agony at his Tribunal, for whose Salvation we had once Opportunity of doing much more than we have in fact done. But especially, let us diligently watch for the Souls of those that are immediately committed to us; let us warn, exhort, and

* Eccl. ix. 10.

beseech them to be reconciled to God †; let us set before them from Day to Day, the infinite Importance of their eternal Concerns, the Certainty and Solemnity of the Judgment to come, and the immense Terrours of being found estranged from an inward Principle of saving Grace; let us bear them upon our Hearts before God, *cry mightily to him* ‡ in their Behalf, and *travail in Birth, till Christ is formed in them* ||.

3. What abundant Cause have they to bless the Riches of divine Grace, that have Reason to hope that they are prepared for the Coming of Christ.

By Nature, we are the same inattentive and delaying Creatures, as others around us. Many of us undoubtedly well remember the Time when we were so in Fact, and we should have continued so to this Day, and even to the End, had not the Grace of God delivered us from so dreadful a Condition. If then we are brought out of it; if we have learnt the Value of saving Grace, and the Danger of resting in any thing short of it; if we have been too much alarmed to dare to delay an Attention to the great Affairs of Eternity, and have Reason joyfully to conclude, that we shall have no Complaint to make at Death and Judgment, of our Lamps gone out, of an empty Profession detected and vanishing, and of Salvation for ever lost;

† 2 Cor. v. 20. ‡ Jonah iii. 8. || Gal. iv. 19.

no Agonies of disappointed Hope to endure, and no ineffectual Cries to offer to those that cannot help us; we must ever thankfully acknowledge *that by Grace we are saved, through Faith; and that not of ourselves; it is the Gift of God* *: that *by the Grace of God we are what we are* † now, and are waiting for the further Grace to be brought unto us at the Revelation of Jesus Christ ‡. Adore then, O Believer, with perpetual Gratitude and Wonder, the Riches of that Mercy thou hast already experienced, and from which thou art expecting such great things hereafter, and earnestly cry for the further animating and assisting Grace of the Holy Spirit, to engage thee *to give all Diligence to make thy Calling and Election sure* ||.

* Eph. ii. 8. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 13.
|| 2 Pet. i. 10.

S E R M O N XI.

The different Consequences of the
Conduct of the wise and foolish
Virgins.

M A T T H. XXV. 10.

And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the Door was shut.

TIS deplorable to observe the wretched Thoughtlessness of the greatest Part of Mankind, with respect to the most certain and important Concerns of Futurity; while they are sufficiently thoughtful, and indeed often excessively anxious, about its meaner, and most uncertain Events; and thereby make it evident, that their Inattention to their eternal Interests does not
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proceed barely from their being future and unseen, but from the Attachment of fallen Nature to earthly Objects, and a most dangerous, though disguised kind of Unbelief, either as to the Certainty, or at least the great Importance of eternal things.

What Multitudes of Mankind think much of Futurity for the *present Life*, how they shall live, and act, and what Supports and Enjoyments they shall have on the one Hand, or what Sorrows they shall endure on the other, in future Years, which yet, perhaps, are not before them! How many are saying, like that rich Fool, *Luke xii. 19. Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry.* How many Parents are thinking, how pleasing will it be to see my Children grown up, and well settled in Life, to be eased of my present Cares for them, to see the Fruit of all my Pains and Solitude on their Account, in their Prosperity, Comfort, and Honour; and to receive the Testimonies of their Duty and Gratitude in my advanced Years! How many others are anxiously thinking, how shall I live when I am old? what shall I have to support me, when I shall be no longer capable of my present Employments? or how solitary and melancholy will my old Age be, when my Family is dispersed, or my dearest Relatives and Friends dead! Most precarious Imaginations! when per-

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haps God is at the same time saying, *Thou Fool*, this Year, this Week, or *this Night*, *thy Soul shall be required of thee*.

But who asks, “How shall I die? What
 “will be my Thoughts of myself, of my
 “Time spent upon Earth, of my Temper
 “and Conduct, and of the amazing Eter-
 “nity before me, when it is in immediate
 “View? Will there be nothing then to
 “pain my Conscience, and fill me with
 “Terror? Can I meet the great Summons
 “with Composure and Delight? Shall I be
 “able to say, *come Lord Jesus **, come
 “quickly? What will my State then ap-
 “pear to be, and shall I be found well pre-
 “pared for that solemn Season? What Ob-
 “jects shall I see, when I first enter into
 “the World of Spirits, attending Angels,
 “or surrounding Devils? How shall I ap-
 “pear before my Judge? will it be with
 “Acceptance and Joy, or with trembling
 “and Confusion? Shall I hear him say,
 “*Well done, good and faithful Servant*; or,
 “will he say, *Depart from me, thou cursed,*
 “*into everlasting Fire †*? What will be
 “my Portion then, and what my everlast-
 “ing Employment? celebrating the high
 “Praises of God, or groaning under the
 “Pressure of his Wrath, and blaspheming
 “him, because of my Torments? With
 “what Company shall I be joined? will it

* Rev. xxii. 20.

† Matth. xxv. 21, 23, 41.

“ be with the glorious Society of Angels,
“ Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, and all the
“ Multitudes that have died in Jesus, or
“ with the miserable, malignant, and hate-
“ ful Company of Devils and Sinners.”

Which of you, my Friends, ask yourselves such Questions, and seek to regulate your Temper and Conduct by the solemn Import of them? 'Tis the Design of the foregoing and subsequent Meditations, on this alarming Parable, to lead you to such Inquiries, that you may meet your great Change with Pleasure, and stand before your Judge with Honour and Delight. Attend then, to what is, by divine Assistance, to be further offered to you on this Head, from the Words before us; in which we may observe such things as these ---- The Period put to the unseasonable Preparation of the foolish Virgins, by the Coming of the Bridegroom ---- the prepared State in which the Wise were found ---- the happy Consequence of it to them ---- and the Exclusion of the Foolish by shutting the Door. We observe here,

1. The Period put to the unseasonable Preparation of the foolish Virgins, by the Coming of the Bridegroom.

They were at length so far awaked from their Folly, that they were determined to hearken to the Counsel of the wise Virgins, and they applied themselves to put it in

Practice; *they went to buy Oil for their Lamps*, flattering themselves, that even yet it might not be too late. Thus, the unhappy Creatures, who have lived estranged from the Power of Godliness, when they are alarmed by the Apprehension of a speedy Appearance before their Judge, are perhaps disposed to take the Counsel that Ministers and Christians give them, and begin to use such Means of Grace as their Circumstances will admit: and the Signs of the second Coming of Christ, when at hand, may probably produce the like Effect.

When the foolish Virgins took their Lamps, they had Opportunity to provide the Oil they wanted for them; and if they had done so then, they would have escaped the Charge of Folly, with all the Disorder and Disappointment that were the Consequences of it; they had acted with real Wisdom, and had had nothing to do, when the Bridegroom was coming, but to arise and trim their Lamps, and meet and wait upon him. But now the Time was expired; now their Lamps were called for, and the Purchase of Oil now too late to answer its End. So unseasonable is both the Preparation of the dying Sinner for an Appearance before God, and that which may be attempted when the Solemnities of the great Day are upon the Point of taking Place. Once there were Means of Grace in Plenty, where
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the Light of the Gospel shone ; Months and Years of Opportunity for the Use of them, and obtaining the highest Advantage by them, and in general, nothing to hinder, which the Sinner himself could deliberately think to be a sufficient Hinderance ; but then they were lightly esteemed, and either neglected or carelessly used. But when Life and the Means of Grace are concluding, the most eager Application to the Use of them, has this to damp the Hope of important Advantage from them, that it is deplorably late and unseasonable, and in consequence of it they are confused, disordered, and disturbed, either by the settling of worldly Affairs, or by the Grief and solicitous Care of Friends ; by the trembling Apprehensions of the Sinner's own Mind, or by the Pains and Languors of Nature, hastening to its Dissolution. The Sinner then awakened, cannot but himself perceive how late and unseasonable his poor feeble Efforts are, and it alarms and terrifies him to reflect that they are so ; and the faithful Friends of his Soul, cannot but lament that it is so late, before they could obtain any Attention from him.

While the foolish Virgins went to buy, the Bridegroom came : He would not stay their Time, nor delay on Account of their Absence, and want of Preparation, which they ought to have made before. In like manner, the Lord Jesus will not wait, on

Account of the Sinner's Delays : He has fixed his Time for coming, whether the Sinner has fixed his for beginning to prepare for it or not ; nor will he prolong it, because the thoughtless Creature sees fit to prolong his Time without bounds ; and he often cuts short the trembling Preparation of the Sinner's last Hours, by a speedy Summons to appear before him. One Hour the poor foolish Creature is alarmed, and begins to prepare, and the next, goes to give an Account of his former shameful Procrastination. Observe,

2. The prepared State in which the wise Virgins were found.

It was their great Wisdom and Happiness, that they were ready when the Bridegroom came, and had no Need to wish for his further Delay ; while the Case of the foolish Virgins was just the reverse. This will be the great Distinction betwixt Saints and Sinners at last, that the one are, and the other are not ready for the Coming of Christ. But as it is of the utmost Importance, that we should not deceive ourselves in an Affair of such immense Consequence, with imagining a little slight hasty Preparation just at Christ's Coming sufficient, as there's Reason to fear many do, I shall attempt to explain the Nature of genuine Preparation for it, by observing, That it consists in a fixed Disposition of Heart for the Service of Christ,
discovered

discovered by its proper Fruits in our Temper and Conduct, as long as we live.

A real Preparation for the Coming of Christ, must consist in a fixed Bent and Disposition of the Mind for his Service: For how is it possible, that they should appear before him with Courage and Comfort, that have not made it their prevailing, and abiding Choice to please and serve him? Such a Disposition is founded, in a deep Conviction of the Guilt, of having *served divers Lusts* * and Vanities, of the dangerous and pernicious nature of that abominable Servitude, of the great Obligation and Advantage of the Service of Christ, and the unspeakable Blessedness of an Interest in so glorious a Saviour. But it is possible, and unhappily often the Case in Fact, however essential a Foundation of a Work of saving Grace such a Conviction is, at least in adult Persons, that yet there is no Superstructure built upon it, but the present impressive Sense of these things dies away, without producing any lasting Effects. Herein Convictions and Conversion differ, how nearly soever they resemble each other for a Time, that the former leave the Mind, though alarmed, yet not fixed for the Service of Christ, and a Prey to the future Temptations of Satan, and Allurements of Sin; but the latter leaves no longer any room for

* Tit. iii. 3.

Hesitation and Suspence, but absolutely determines the Mind; and that not only for a Time, but for the whole Life. They that are truly converted from Sin to God, *join themselves to the Lord, in a perpetual Covenant never to be forgotten* †, and devote themselves so cordially to serve him, that there is nothing which they dread so much as forsaking him; they are distrustful of themselves, and afraid of the Snares that surround them, lest they should seduce them from their Lord. They lament, that through the Infirmary of the present State, they turn aside so often from his Service, humble themselves before him for every Instance, in which they are conscious of having done so, and watch and pray, that they may serve him with greater Constancy and Zeal for the future: they *love their divine Master and his Service, and would by no Means go out free* ‡, if they might; if he would give them a Discharge from it, instead of regarding it as a Privilege, they would consider it as the most grievous Curse, and intreat him to continue them in it still; and it is one of the most pleasing Views of the heavenly World to them, that they shall there serve their beloved Lord perfectly, and to all Eternity.

And as real Christians are thus determined for the Service of Christ in Conversion; so it appears, that they are so, by the pre-

† Jer. l. 5.

‡ Exod. xxi. 5.

vailing Bent of their Conversation afterwards. As their Lord has assigned them their Work, both such as relates to the Welfare of their own Souls, and such by which they may do good to others, according to the particular Stations in which he has placed them, they apply themselves to both, in Proportion to the Strength and Exercise of Grace, with a solicitous Concern that they may meet him at last with Pleasure, and give up their Account before him with Joy. They have a Course of constant Duties to maintain, for the Welfare of their own Souls, to acquaint themselves well with the Discoveries that the Lord has made of himself, and of their Duty, their Danger, and their Happiness; to examine their Hearts and their Ways by the Standard of his Word, and to seek universal and growing Conformity to it; to keep up a happy Intercourse with him, in daily spiritual Approaches to his Throne; to maintain a stedfast Warfare against Sin, to seek the Mortification of it in all its Forms and Degrees, and to get a Heart disengaged from this World, increasing Degrees of heavenly Mindedness, and more Fitness for the World of Glory.

They have also their Work to do for the Good of others, according to their several Stations, to which they are solicitous to maintain a constant Attention. 'Tis the Duty of Ministers *to watch for Souls, as those that*

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that must give an Account *; *to travail in Birth till Christ is formed* † *in their Hearers; to preach the Word, to be instant in Season and out of Season, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering and Doctrine* ‡; *to comfort the feeble minded, to support the weak* ||, *to build up and confirm the Saints, and labour to promote the spiritual Prosperity, and eternal Happiness of all that are committed to their Care, and of others, to whom God may give them occasional Opportunities of Service.* 'Tis the Duty of Parents, earnestly to seek, to lay a Foundation of Religion in the Minds of their Children, to form them for the Service of God, and Usefulness to their Fellow-Creatures; to teach, warn, and restrain them from the Ways of Folly and of Sin; *to bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord* §, and earnestly to pray for an abundant Blessing upon them. 'Tis the Duty of other Relatives, to study each other's Comfort and Advantage for the present Life, and especially to contribute, as far as possible, to each other's eternal Salvation. 'Tis the Duty of Christians in general, to seek to diffuse a Sense of Religion among their Friends and Acquaintance, to set them an Example of Watchfulness, Self-Denial, Meekness, Hu-

* Heb. xiii. 17.
|| 1 Theff. v. 14.

† Gal. iv. 19.
§ Eph. vi. 4.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

mility,

mility, Patience, and universal Holiness, and to build up each other in their most holy Faith and Comfort. Such is the Work which Christ has assigned his Servants, and in which they employ themselves, according to the Strength, and Prevalence of their Love and Duty to their great Lord: Such is the Life of a Christian, tho' maintained with different Degrees of Assiduity and Zeal, both in different Christians, and in the same Christian at different Times; but it is the Life which every Christian desires, endeavours, and prays to be enabled to live, that he may be found ready at the Coming of Christ, and his Work well done, according to the Time that is allowed him, and still carrying on, till his Lord shall see fit to exchange his Services upon Earth, for the nobler Services of the Kingdom of Glory. We observe again,

3. The happy Consequence of the Preparation of the wise Virgins, for the Coming of the Bridegroom; *they went in with him to the Marriage.*

This, as applied to the future Happiness of the Saints, represents their joining the glorious Assembly above, their going to be with Christ, and partaking of the rich Blessings that he has prepared for them.

'Tis natural to suppose other Guests invited, and attending on such an Occasion, besides the Virgins or Bride-Maids; they, therefore

therefore that were ready, when they had performed the Service that was expected from them, went in with the Bridegroom, to join the Company assembled in his House, and may be reasonably imagined to be received with Honour and Applause, when it was related, how remarkable a Difference there had been between their Conduct, and that of the foolish Virgins. In like manner, the genuine Friends and Servants of the Lord Jesus, shall be received at his Coming, both at Death, and the general Judgment, into the glorious Society of Angels and of Saints above, and rejoice with them in his Espousals. At present we are in a great measure Strangers to the blessed Angels, those glorious and holy Spirits, of whom the Word of God speaks so much; they make no more such frequent Appearances to the Saints, as in former Ages, though they still invisibly *minister to them, who shall be the Heirs of Salvation**: but the Accounts which the Scriptures give us, of their Dignity, Glory, Wisdom, and Beneficence to the sincere Followers of Christ, may justly give us exalted Ideas of the Pleasure it will afford to the Saints, to join their illustrious Society, to hear their Wisdom, and their sublime Adorations, and to learn from them the interesting Histories they are capable of relating, such as that of the Fall

* Heb. i. 14.

of their apostate Brethren; the Particulars of the Creation of the World; the Services they have performed for the Church in general, and particular Saints, through the several Ages of Time? and especially, the affectionate Offices, in which they had been engaged for us; with all the other wonderful Discoveries which they are undoubtedly well able to make, and which not improbably they may be appointed to make. But perhaps we can more easily conceive of the Pleasure to be expected, from the Company of the Saints that once dwelt below; and surely the Mind that has conversed much, and with becoming Attention and Pleasure, with the sacred Records, cannot but highly relish the Thought, of seeing and spending eternal Ages with so many excellent Persons, of whom so much is related there; those invited Guests, those eminently wise Virgins, those watchful Expectants, and ardent Friends of the blessed Bridegroom, in former Ages; such as *Enoch*, and *Noah* that *walked with God**; *Abraham* his Friend†, that distinguished Pattern of Faith; *Moses*, *Samuel*, *David*, and the Prophets, *Peter* and *John*, *Paul*, *Barnabas*, *Timothy*, *Titus*, and others, whose Names shine in the sacred Pages; the truly heroic Multitudes that *loved not their lives unto the Death*‡, for the

* Gen. v. 22, 24. vi. 9. † 2 Chron. xx. 7. Isa. xli. 8.

‡ Rev. xii. 11.

fake of the Testimony of Jesus ; with those excellent Persons in later Ages, whose Writings have warned, quickened, refreshed, and comforted us, and the innumerable Multitudes of *the Excellent of the Earth**, whom we have never known or heard of. But it is especially pleasing, to reflect upon meeting those whom we have known, and loved upon Earth, the dear Companions of our Youth, and first Espousals to Christ, the excellent Parents, the pious Children, or the other dear Relatives, our Relation to whom has been one of the most signal Blessings of our Lives, and the affectionate Friends, with whom *we once took sweet Counsel, and walked to the House of God in Company*†, whose Bodies we have laid with Sorrow in the Grave, and perhaps felt the Pain of those Wounds long, which their Separation from us gave. These are the Guests that are already *called*, to attend and partake of *the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb*‡, the amiable Company that we shall meet there, if we also love the Lord Jesus Christ ; and how great a Happiness will it be to join such Society, to be placed in the same Rank with them, and converse with them as our most endeared, and everlasting Friends and Companions.

Yet this will by no means be the principal Blessedness that awaits the Saints, in the

* Psal. xvi. 3. † Psal. lv. 14. ‡ Rev. xix. 9.

Kingdom of their Lord: they go to be with Christ, from whom both they, and their Brethren derive all their transporting Bliss: This is so great a Blessing that the Apostle *Paul* makes it the Summary of the Happiness of the heavenly World, *1 Thess.* iv. 17. *And so shall we ever be with the Lord:* To the same Purpose the Apostle *John* says, *1 John* iii. 2. *And it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is:* And our Lord frequently makes it the Description of the future Felicity of his Servants, and the Subject of his great Promise to them, particularly, *John* xii. 26. *If any Man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my Servant be:* and *John* xiv. 3. *If I go and prepare a Place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also:* and *John* xvii. 24. *Father, I will that those also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my Glory which thou hast given me.* Most gracious and condescending Language from the Lord of Glory, concerning Worms so mean, so unworthy of his least Favour, and so deserving of his highest Displeasure; such as a Soul that loves the Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity and Truth, cannot but hear with Pleasure, in Proportion to the Fervency of its Love to him! His gracious Presence with his Ser-

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vants upon Earth, is the sweetest Entertainment that Mortality is capable of, and, when they are favoured with any remarkable Degrees of *Fellowship with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ**, their sacred Pleasures rise, far above all that the Riches, and Honours of this World, and the Gratifications of Sense can afford, and indeed far above all other intellectual Pleasures themselves. But to go to be with him, to dwell in his immediate Presence, to see him Face to Face, in all the Riches of his Glory and Grace, and sit beneath his everlasting Smiles, this will be supreme Pleasure and extatic Bliss! The Believer's Love to the Lord Jesus Christ will render it so; to spend eternal Ages in his Presence, whom he has chosen for his Portion, after whom his Soul has longed, and the Enjoyment of whom he has made the great Object of his Pursuit: to be united to so beloved, and so gracious a Friend, in the strictest, the most tender, and everlasting Bonds, will be the Fulfilment of his best Wishes and most ardent Prayers, and that from which he must derive the most rapturous, constant, and eternal Delight.

There also shall Believers partake of the rich Blessings that Christ has prepared for them; *in God's Presence there is Fulness of Joy, and at his right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore†*: There the Tree of Know-



* 1 John i. 3.

† Psal. xvi. 11.

ledge grows, without any Danger attending it; and the Tree of Life flourishes in immortal Beauty and Fruitfulness, and according to the significant Account given of it, *Rev. xxii. 2. It bears twelve manner of Fruits, and yields its Fruit every Month*; no longer guarded by Cherubims and a flaming Sword, like that in the earthly Paradise, but free for the constant Access of all the Inhabitants of the new Jerusalem. The Enlargement of the Faculties of the Saints, will render them capable of Pleasures, far superiour to all that they are acquainted with at present, perhaps of such, of which they have not at present even the least Conception. But to have Sin for ever destroyed, to be made perfect in Holiness, to have the feeble Sparks of Love to God, which were here kindled in their Hearts, blown up into a bright and everlasting Flame; to spend Eternity in his Service and his Praise, to glow with immortal Ardour in this blissful Employment, and to have no more Intrusions of Vanity to pollute and interrupt it, will be Blessedness indeed, which a sanctified Mind cannot but look for with Desire and Pleasure, but which shall far exceed the most exalted Expectations. 'Tis inexpressibly delightful, to come to God with holy Fervour of Devotion now, amidst all the Imperfections that attend it; but to draw near his Throne, with more divine Fervour,

and without any Remainder of Imperfection, must necessarily afford the most consummate Delight. But we turn our Eyes from this delightful Theme, to a far different View ; and observe,

4. The Exclusion of all others, by the shutting of the Door.

The Guests immediately proceed to the Entertainments of the nuptial Feast ; and no Admittance remains for those that came afterwards. *Now is the accepted Time, now is the Day of Salvation* * ; now the Door of Hope and Mercy stands open ; God sits upon a Throne of Grace, and Jesus stretches forth the Sceptre of Peace and Mercy, to every Soul that is willing to bow to it, and accept the Blessings he has prepared : But *when once the Master of the House is risen up, and hath shut to the Door*, to refer to *Luke xiii. 25.* when once the Time which sovereign Wisdom has fixed for that Purpose, is come, there can be no Delay, in Favour of those who neglected the Day of Gospel Grace, and slighted all its precious Invitations, and no Admittance afterwards obtained. The Door is shut, by an irrevocable Decree, to be opened no more.

But who can sufficiently represent the Misery of those, that are excluded from all the Blessedness that has been described ? who can paint the Agonies of Disappointment in

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

those foolish Creatures, *who knew not the things that belonged to their Peace in the Day thereof* †? *when they shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and themselves thrust out* ‡. “For them the Door was open,” may we suppose the excluded Sinner crying on that tremendous Occasion, “but shut against me; and, oh! most tormenting Thought, once it stood open for me; open long; and I was called, and earnestly entreated to enter in while I might; but I refused to hearken then, and now it is for ever too late; now *I seek to enter in, and am not able* ||; and have an Eternity before me to deplore and curse my Folly, and bewail my Misery, now become irremediable.”

Oh! my Friends, let the solemn Thought sink deep into your Hearts at present; let the dreadful Clause, sound like Thunder in your Ears, as a Means to prevent the Accomplishment of it to yourselves hereafter, *and the Door was shut*, irrevocably and for ever shut; as it will certainly be at last, to every Soul that refuses to hearken to the Calls of the Gospel now, and to enter while the Door is open. And let every one reflect with Fear and Trembling, how dreadful would it be, if this should be my Case! should I carry with me *a Lie in my right*

† Luke xix. 42. ‡ Luke xiii. 28. || Luke xiii. 24.

Hand *, to the great Tribunal; should I stand convicted there of having *chosen my own Ways* †, made my own Terms of Salvation, built my everlasting Hopes upon a sandy Foundation, or trifled away the precious Opportunity of laying hold on the Gospel Salvation; should I find the Door of Mercy shut against me, others entering in, but myself excluded for ever; what wild Surprise! what exquisite Anguish and Horror! what dreadful Consternation, and overwhelming, distracted Despair, would seize me, at that tremendous Day!

The terrifying Thought naturally leads us to the first of those Reflections, with a few of which I conclude this Discourse.

I. How important a Point of Wisdom and Duty, is the diligent Improvement of Time, and the Means of Grace, at present allowed us.

Is there a Day at hand, a Day which every rising Sun, which every Hour, which every Breath we draw, brings nearer and nearer, when all Preparation for the Coming of Christ will be too late, if it has been neglected till then; when tremendous Justice will put a Period to the feeble confused Efforts towards it, which Consternation may extort from the ruined Sinner? And will this be the Consequence of Neglect and Delay,

* Isa. xlv. 20.

† Isa. lxvi. 3.

that the Door of Mercy shall be shut, without Hope of its ever being opened any more? How precious then is Time! How carefully, how earnestly, this more than golden Talent, should be improv'd, for the great Purpose of preventing so terrible a Catastrophe! How precious every Hour! not to be wasted at the Pleasure of every one, that would find something to employ it, at the Solicitation of every Vanity that tempts our Attention; but used for some important Advantage. What inestimable Seasons in particular, are those allotted for religious Duties, for Converse with the Word of God and our own Hearts, and for presenting our Supplications before the Lord! What a Treasure are our Sabbaths, these holy and important Days, on the Improvement of which, Eternity so greatly depends! Shall we trifle away common, and especially sacred Time, and Opportunities of obtaining eternal Advantage, till it is too late; till the Door is shut; till Tears, and Groans, and Sighs, will be for ever in vain? Let us tremble to think of it; let the alarming Thought return upon our Minds from Time to Time, where-ever we go, and whatever we do; let it influence our Hours of Conversation and Solitude; let it command the most solemn Attention, when we read the Scriptures, and our serious Reflection upon them afterwards; let

us carry it with us to the Ordinances of God, and to the Footstool of his Throne. These are the Seasons which abundant Mercy has appointed, to prevent so dreadful a Case hereafter: let us be earnestly concerned to improve them, as they return; and may Almighty Grace teach us indeed to do it.

2. What an Antidote against the alluring Influence of worldly Vanities, does the Expectation of the Entertainments of the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb afford.

What Comparison can there be betwixt the Indulgence of sensual Appetites, and the Blessedness that has been described, as the future Portion of the Followers of the Lamb; which yet inconceivably exceeds all possible Description? What a Shame would it be to suffer the former to come into Competition with the latter, or even to hesitate one Moment which to prefer, the Gratifications of Brutes, or the Entertainments of Angels? especially when so unworthy a Preference would exclude us from such exalted Bliss? Can it admit a Debate which should be chosen, the short-liv'd and scanty Honours of a few Days, or the most public, illustrious and eternal Honour? the uncertain, and the fading Riches of Mortality, or *durable Riches and Righteousness* *? Do we hope, through Grace, shortly to join the

* Prov. viii. 18.

glorious Assembly above, to behold their Saviour and ours, in all his Glory and his Grace, and to partake of eternal Blessedness purchased by his Blood, and prepared by his Love? and can we grovel so low, and *set our Affections on Things on Earth* †, instead of Things in Heaven? What a Shame is it for an Heir of Heaven to cleave to the Dust, and forget his divine Inheritance! Let us rise with fervent Zeal, and lay hold on Life, Glory, and eternal Happiness; animated by the blessed Hope, fir'd by the glorious Prospect, and spurning at every Vanity that would tempt us from the Pursuit of it.

3. What a powerful Support may so divine a Hope afford, under all the Trials and Burdens of Life.

Have we Reason, through the Riches of sovereign Mercy, to hope, that we shall shortly enter in with the blessed Bridegroom, to the Marriage, and partake of all the abundant Joy of it? and are we assured, that this shall not be a transitory Entertainment, but endure to Eternity? how much then ought the Sorrows, as well as the flattering Amusements of Earth, to dwindle in our View! Look up, ye Heirs of Heaven, *to the Grace that is to be brought unto you at the Revelation of Jesus Christ* *. View it in its

† Col. iii. 2.

* 1 Pet. i. 13.

Extent, its Variety, and its Duration, and say, Is it hard to bear the *light and momentary Afflictions* of the present Time, with an *exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* † before you? Let this silence every Murmur, compose every Tumult of the Mind, and teach the Language of Triumph and Joy, amidst Burdens so soon to be removed, and Sorrows to be felt no more for ever.

† 2 Cor. iv. 17.

S E R-

S E R M O N XII.

The final Exclusion of the foolish
Virgins from the nuptial Feast.

M A T T H. XXV. 11, 12.

Afterwards came also the other Virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

THE Words that I speak unto you, says the Lord Jesus to his Disciples, *John vi. 63. they are Spirit, and they are Life:* But surely there are none of all his divine Discourses, to which the Observation may be more justly applied, than to the Parable to which we have been so long attending. If we have found it, with respect to its Influence upon us, to answer this Account, which the Lord Jesus has given of his Words in general, with respect to their own Nature, we shall have Reason for
the

the most lasting Pleasure and Gratitude, in the Review of our Meditations upon it.

But is there not Ground to fear, that to many, all that has been hitherto spoken, has been in vain ; that they have heard as if they heard not ; and have no more real and abiding Concern, to be prepared for the Coming of Christ, than they had when we entered upon these Discourses, than if they believed nothing they have heard, or thought they had no Concern in it ? Ask yourselves, I beseech you, whether this is, or is not your Case ? You that are yet young, have you heard as if you believed the immense Importance of these things to yourselves ? or have you not been hitherto, in Confidence of your Youth, as thoughtless of the Coming of Christ as the foolish Virgins, who slumbered and slept, without any Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps ? Has not this been the Case with others of you, who are grown old in a long Attendance upon the Word of God, and yet to this Day have never felt, nor been concerned that you might feel, the Power of it on your Hearts ; but hear with equal Indifference and Disregard, the most gracious and moving Messages of the Gospel, and the loudest and most awful Thunders of divine Wrath against wilful and obstinate Sinners ? Does not Conscience whisper in some of your Breasts, “ My Case is not good ; I am not yet in

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“ a safe State for an eternal World; and
“ should the Lord Jesus come now, it must
“ be to my Confusion and Ruin!” And yet
are you not upon the whole at rest, from
Day to Day, from Week to Week, and
from Year to Year, and neglecting to flee
to the Fountain of Grace for your healing
and Salvation?

Oh that I had Reason to hope, that any
of you had been effectually roused from this
fatal Lethargy, by what has been already
offered on this awakening Parable; and oh
that what is now to be further offered,
might be made the Means, in the Hands of
the blessed Spirit, of accomplishing so im-
portant a Purpose. But know assuredly, that
whether you awake or sleep on, the solemn
things signified by our Lord in this Parable,
will certainly come to pass, to every one of
you, according to your different Characters.
A tremendous View now opens upon us, of
the irrecoverable Ruin of Sinners at the
Coming of Christ, under the Figure of the
final Exclusion of the foolish Virgins from
the Marriage-Supper, notwithstanding their
importunate Cries to the affronted Bride-
groom. We particularly observe in these
Words, the late Arrival of the other Vir-
gins ----- their Acknowledgment of the
Bridegroom's Authority and Propriety in the
nuptial Feast ---- their Cry for Admittance
---- the fatal Disappointment they meet
2 with

with ---- the Bridegroom's disowning them
 ---- and the Solemnity with which he does
 it. Observe here,

1. The late Arrival of the other Vir-
 gins.

So particular an Account of them has
 been presented to us in the former Part of
 the Parable, that the attentive Mind will
 easily recollect the several Parts of their
 Character, with the Application of each to
 insincere Professors of Religion. They were
 Virgins, such as had escaped the grossest
 Pollutions of the World, not numbered
 among the openly profane, but Persons that
 maintained a fair Appearance in the Eyes of
 their Fellow-Creatures; they had taken
 their Lamps, therein representing those who
 attend upon the Ordinances of God, and
 practise external Duties with such Regula-
 rity and Decency, that perhaps no mortal
 Eye can, with any Certainty, discover the
 Insincerity of their Profession; these other
 Virgins professed themselves the Friends and
 Expectants of the Bridegroom, and went
 out with the wise Virgins to meet him; but
 they were so foolish, as to take no Oil with
 them in their Vessels, for the Supply of
 their Lamps, and to sleep, notwithstanding
 this material Neglect; in both which Re-
 spects, their Folly is exactly copied by hy-
 pocritical Professors, who content themselves
 with a bare Profession of Religion, without

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an inward vital Principle of it, and yet sleep in this deplorable Condition, and dream of Heaven, without any Interest in it, without any Evidence of a Title to it, and while they are destitute of every thing truly spiritual, of every thing that can render their Profession excellent and durable, and that will stand them in any Stead at the Coming of Christ. The Lamps of these other Virgins were gone out when they were most wanted; they trimmed them, but to no Purpose, as they had no Oil for their Supply; they asked it in vain of the wise Virgins, and were absent and unprepared when the Bridegroom came; in which Particulars we have an awful Emblem, of the Extinction of the vain Profession of the Hypocrite, of his late Alarm, unseasonable Preparation, and vain Application to the Saints for Relief at the Coming of Christ.

These Foolish Virgins came at last, still ready to flatter themselves with the Hope of being admitted to the Marriage-Supper. Herein perhaps our Lord intended to intimate, what he so plainly and solemnly teaches upon other Occasions; that Sinners may, and many of them will, keep up their vain Hopes even to the End. Some of them indeed, are startled at the Apprehensions of the Approach of the great Judge; but others are insensible, maintain a confident, though groundless Expectation of Happiness, even
amidst

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amidst such Apprehensions, till its Fallacy is finally detected: thus our Lord says, *Matth. vii. 22, 23. Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.* So deeply is the false Confidence of many rooted in their Minds, that they will carry it with them into an eternal World itself, and then only be convinced of their Mistake, when they open their Eyes upon its dreadful Solemnities. Our Lord here represents them, as even offering their vain Pleas before him; vain Pleas, though far superiour to what any insincere Professor among us can ever offer; that they had even prophesied and wrought Miracles in Christ's Name, yet they are found Workers of Iniquity, and the Prophecies they had delivered, and the Miracles they had wrought stand them in no Stead; even such Pleas as these will be over-ruled and silenced for ever, and how much more the far meaner Pleas, which hypocritical Professors in common may attempt to offer.

These other Virgins arrive too late; the Guests were assembled; the wise Virgins, with whom they had set out to meet the Bridegroom, were entered, and the Door was shut. The great Master of the Feast,
Jesus,

Jesus, the Blessed Bridegroom, at present proclaims, and orders his Servants to proclaim in his Name, that *yet there is Room* *; but when once he is come, and they that are ready are entered with him to the Marriage, the blessed Proclamation will be made no more, and that which had been made so often, will stand no longer in Force; *the Day that it had limited* †, will be then expired, and no further Time be allowed for the Admission of those that had not accepted it before. We observe,

2. The Acknowledgment which the foolish Virgins make, of the Authority and Propriety of the Bridegroom in the nuptial Feast.

They cry, Lord, Lord, addressing him in the Language of Respect and Reverence, and therein acknowledge his Right, to admit them, whom he pleased, to the Feast which he had provided. The Lord Jesus has prepared his heavenly Kingdom, and all the Entertainments of it for his Servants, at the mighty Price of his own Blood; 'tis *his everlasting Kingdom* ‖, where he reigns with absolute Sway, and admits whom he will; *all Power in Heaven*, as well as *in Earth*, is *given to him* ‡; the Mansions of Glory are at his Disposal, and none can enter there, but

* Luke xiv. 22.

† Heb. iv. 7.

‖ 2 Pet. i. 11.

‡ Matth. xxviii. 18.

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by virtue of the Purchase of his Blood, and by the Gift of his free and unmerited Bounty : Thus he proclaims his own Glory, Rev. i. 18. *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the Keys of Hell, or the invisible World, and Death.* And again, Rev. iii. 7. *These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, and he that hath the Key of David, he that openeth, and no Man shutteth; and shutteth, and no Man openeth.*

Every Creature shall shortly see it to be thus; and all shall be obliged to own Christ's supreme Authority, as *the King whom God has set upon his holy Hill of Zion**, and the sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, according to the Prophecy, Isa. xlv. 23. *I have sworn by myself, the Word is gone out of my Mouth in Righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every Knee shall bow, every Tongue shall swear: which the Apostle quotes, as referring to the Lord Jesus, and to be accomplished when we shall all stand before his Judgment Seat.* Rom. xiv. 11. *For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every Knee shall bow to me, and every Tongue shall confess to God.* And to the same Purpose he says, Phil. ii. 9, 11. *That God has highly exalted him, and given him a Name which is above every Name: That at the Name of Jesus every Knee should bow, of things in Heaven,*

* Psal. ii. 6.

and

and things in Earth, and things under the Earth; and that every Tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father. So universal shall the Acknowledgment of his Sovereignty be, by all the glorious Spirits that now surround his Throne, by all that shall be found alive upon Earth when he comes, and all that slumber in Death under the Earth. Those that now most boldly deny him, and pour insolent Contempt upon his Gospel, shall at last be obliged to own him, as the Sovereign and Proprietor of the World of Glory; and the Tongue that has here blasphemed his glorious Majesty, shall cry, not indeed in genuine Repentance, but with the utmost Anguish and Horror, Lord, Lord. They also, who amidst their Acknowledgments of him as such, were not obedient to him, shall then be obliged to confess his sovereign Authority, in a manner far different, from that in which they did it upon Earth: But as it is not enough to do so now, so the more solemn manner in which it must then be done, will not be sufficient; and as the former will appear in all its Vanity, so the latter will stand the disobedient Sinner in no Stead: According to our Lord's solemn Warning, *Matth. vii. 21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth*

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the Will of my Father which is in Heaven. We observe again,

3. The Petition of these other Virgins to the Bridegroom to open to them.

The Day approaches, when the most insensible Sinners will be convinced of their deplorable State, and of the Ruin they have brought upon themselves, by their Neglect of the Gospel Salvation. They will perceive what immeasurable Glory and Blessedness they have lost, when they shall see the Friends of Christ entering with him to his everlasting Kingdom, and themselves for ever excluded. They shall see how terrible a Sentence it was, from which the Gospel warned them to flee, and how certain its Denunciations were, against their continued Impenitence and Unbelief, when that Sentence is about to be pronounced, and these Denunciations ready to be confirmed from the great Tribunal. They that fear not the Terrours of divine Wrath at present, nor can be brought to *tremble at the Word of God**, must do it at last; but alas! it will be too late. Oh that every one that hears me, would now stand in Awe of those Declarations which eternal Truth pronounces, the Certainty of which shall soon appear, with undeniable and most dreadful Evidence,

* Ezra ix. 4.

Then

Then shall the wretched Multitudes of the Enemies of the Lord, become humble and most importunate Suppliants to him for Mercy. The poor formal Worshipper, that trifled with God and solemn Duties, will then begin to cry in earnest, and in the Anguish and Bitterness of his Heart, for an Admittance to that glorious Kingdom, which he professed to seek, but to which he in Fact gave every Trifle the Preference. More insensible Sinners that here lived without Prayer, notwithstanding all the Warnings of God and of his Servants, shall then begin to pray; but their Prayers will be too late, and the Judge will bow his Ear to their Supplications no more. I foretell, upon the Authority of the Word of God, to every prayerless Soul among you, that the Day is coming when you shall pray, but pray in vain; when you shall cry to that God, whom you have now forgotten, and to that Saviour, in Negligence of whom you now live, but without Effect; according to that awful Word, *Prov. i. 28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me.* The audacious Sinner himself, who has not only neglected, but despised Prayer, and perhaps called it canting, whining, or other opprobrious Names, shall then present himself with his Heart-rending Cries, before his

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Almighty

Almighty Sovereign and eternal Judge, but without the least Success.

Then would Sinners fain be owned by the Lord Jesus ; they would claim some Relation to him, and rejoice, if it were possible, to be acknowledged by him ; that which now appears so slight a Matter in their Eyes, that they give themselves no Concern about it, will then appear of unspeakably more Worth than ten Thousands of Worlds : They would then fain be numbered among the Saints, and joined to their Society, who here desired no such thing, but shunned their Company and Conversation, and perhaps made the very Name of Saints, the Object of their profane Ridicule and Contempt ; but they shall then be terribly convinced, that to be a Saint indeed, was the highest Honour, and the only Happiness, and would then, if possible, be admitted to their Felicity, and partake of their Glory ; though not from any Love to the Saints and Holiness, to their God and Saviour, and to the spiritual Entertainments of which they shall be put in Possession, but as a Refuge from Hell, and for the Sake of the other Glory and Blessedness of their State ; for Sinners carry with them to Judgment and an everlasting World, still an unsanctified, disobedient, and rebellious Heart, which must therefore be an everlasting Obstacle, to the Success of their most impor-

importunate and piercing Cries. We observe again,

4. The fatal Disappointment which the foolish Virgins meet with.

The Door that was shut, was not opened again at their Request, as they were not ready to enter while it was open; they received an Answer instead of it, but a most terrifying one; their Petition was absolutely rejected, and the Door that was shut continued so.

Awful Representation of the final Disappointment of the Hopes and Prospects of all unconverted Sinners, and especially of hypocritical Professors, after all the vain Profession they have made, and all the vain Expectations, with which they have amused themselves! *Hope, when only deferred, makes the Heart sick* *; but oh, what must the final Disappointment of all the Hopes of Life do, in the most important Instance imaginable, the Disappointment of Hope for Eternity; when all that the Hypocrite has done in Religion, shall appear to be but lost Labour; when he shall be stripped of all his false Disguises, his Soul and Heaven be lost for ever, and no Prayers, no Cries, no Tears, no Groans, no Agonies of wildest Despair, be in the least regarded. "Time was," says the pious Mr. Henry, upon this Passage, "when, Lord, Lord, open to

* Prov. xiii. 12.

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“us, would have sped well, by virtue of
 “that Promise, *knock, and it shall be opened*
 “*unto you* †; but now it comes too late;”
 that gracious Saviour that never did, and
 never will, turn away the Request of a hum-
 ble Penitent, that knocks and cries for Ad-
 mittance at the Gate of Mercy now, will
 hereafter absolutely refuse, to hearken to the
 Cry of those, that will not hear his Voice,
 while it now invites them.

We read not of one Word, which any of
 the wise Virgins said for the foolish; con-
 vinced of the Justice of the Conduct of the
 Bridegroom towards them, and of his Right,
 as the Master of the Feast, to exclude those
 whom he saw unworthy of it, they presume
 not in the least to direct him. Such will
 be the deplorable Case of Sinners at last,
 that they will have none to make Interces-
 sion for them; not one Friend, left in Hea-
 ven or Earth; those that were most tenderly
 concerned for them, while here, that most
 affectionately warned and intreated them,
 that prayed most earnestly for them, wept
 over them, and *travailed in Birth, till Christ*
was formed in their Souls ‡, will then have
 not one Plea to offer in their Behalf, not
 one Word to say for them, not one painful
 Thought on seeing them for ever excluded
 from *the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb* || :
 They will readily acknowledge the Sentence

† Matt. vii. 7.

‡ Gal. iv. 19.

|| Rev. xix. 9.

which

which the Lord Jesus shall pronounce, most wise and righteous, and acquiesce in it as such: All their attention will be swallowed up in that free, sovereign, and wonderful Grace that has saved them, and in the Advancement of Christ's Honour, who redeemed them by his Blood, and introduced them to his Kingdom; nor will they have any Grief for the Exclusion of impenitent and unbelieving Sinners, which indeed would be inconsistent with the Perfection of their own Happiness. Observe here further,

5. The Bridegroom's disowning the foolish Virgins, *I know you not.*

'Tis scarce necessary to observe, that this cannot be understood as implying any Defect in the Knowledge of the Lord Jesus, which equally extends to every Creature and Event. We are assured concerning him in the Days of his Flesh, that *he knew all Men, and needed not that any should testify of Man, for he knew what was in Man**; nor could he, without this, be qualified to *judge the Quick and the Dead*†. 'Tis evident, therefore, that this Expression cannot, either in the Passage before us, or others, in which our Lord uses it, when speaking of the same Subject, intend any thing contrary to his perfect Knowledge of all Men; but he is manifestly to be understood in these Words, as disclaiming any Relation to Sinners, not-

* John ii. 24, 25.

† 2 Tim. iv. 1.

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withstanding their having borne his Name, and flattered themselves with the Hope, of an Admission to his Kingdom, and, notwithstanding the Acknowledgement that they will then be ready to make, of his Authority and Propriety there.

The Import of this awakening Clause may be explained, by supposing the Lord Jesus to address himself to Sinners, in some such Language as this: "I have received
" no Service from you, nor any genuine
" Tokens of your Love and Duty to me.
" You are Persons, with whom I have
" never had any Intercourse, and who have
" not been accustomed to come to God by
" me. I have not seen you, as humble
" Suppliants and Penitents, at the Foot-
" stool of the Throne of Grace, confessing
" and lamenting your Sins, and crying for
" Pardon and Salvation in my Name. I
" have had no earnest Applications from you,
" for Grace to sanctify you, to mortify Sin,
" and to enable you to walk in my Ways.
" I have had no fervent Prayers of yours
" to present to the Father with my holy In-
" cense; nor any such Connection with you,
" as I have had, with all that shall be ad-
" mitted to the Blessings of my Kingdom."
And must it not be most evidently righteous, that such Persons should be treated as Strangers, to whom the Lord Jesus has no Regard, instead of being treated as his Ser-
vants

vants and his Friends? Let your own Consciences decide the Matter, whether it will not be most manifestly equitable, that he should exclude from the Blessings of his heavenly Presence, those who neither had, nor sought any Friendship, or Acquaintance with him upon Earth. We have only further to observe,

6. The Solemnity with which the Bridegroom disowns these other Virgins; *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

The Sentence by which they are excluded from the nuptial Feast, is confirmed by this forcible manner of Expression, which, as Mr. Henry observes upon the Passage, amounts to *swearing in his Wrath that they should not enter into his Rest* *. It becomes particularly solemn, when we consider who it is that pronounces it; *the faithful and the true Witness* †, that can't be deceived, and that cannot deceive, but always speaks most certain and infallible Truth. He it is that will say at the great Day, to every mere external Professor, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.* Others may have been imposed upon, but it is impossible that he should: *He has Eyes like a Flame of Fire* ‡, searches the secret Recesses of the Heart, and sees what every one of us is with an unerring View: And this Declaration immediately

* Heb. iii. 11. † Rev. iii. 14. ‡ Rev. xix. 12.

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from himself, leaves no Room for Sinners to flatter themselves, as they are ready to do when they are warned of it before-hand; that those that warned them are too censorious, and that their Case will not appear to be so bad as it is represented: But the Solemnity of this Declaration, will convince them that it is certain; that there is no more Room for Hope, or offering any further Petitions; that the Decree is gone forth, and cannot be changed, and the publick manner in which the Lord Jesus will pronounce it, will, if possible, further confirm it; it will be before all the Multitudes of his Servants: his Honour therefore, as well as Faithfulness, forbids the Sinner to entertain the least Hope of his ever retracting it.

I conclude this Discourse with the three following Inferences----That our Thoughts of ourselves are by no means decisive ---- that an Acquaintance and Friendship with Christ is indispensably necessary to our Admittance to his Kingdom ---- and that the Distinction betwixt Saints and Sinners will remain, and produce the most important Consequences, when all other Distinctions cease for ever. We infer,

1. That our Thoughts of ourselves are by no means decisive.

We see it exemplified in the Case of the foolish Virgins, who appear not to have abandoned

abandoned all Hope, while there was the least Possibility of maintaining it, notwithstanding their just Alarm when *the Cry was made that the Bridegroom came*: And we see it exemplified in the particular Account, which our Lord gives of the vain Pleas of Sinners, at the great Day of his Coming, in the Passage before referr'd to, *Matt. vii. 22, 23.* The Church of *Laodicea* furnishes another Instance of it: *They said, they were rich, and increased with Goods, and had need of nothing, and knew not that they were, what Christ pronounces them, wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked**. The Apostle *Paul* confirms the same Truth, when he says, *I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord†*: The Judgment which he will pass, will be indeed decisive; but that which we pass upon ourselves, may be, and is often a mistaken one, for want either of judging of ourselves by a right Rule, or of greater Care in examining ourselves by it. The Lord *Jesus* has assured us, that *the Word which he has spoken, the same shall judge us in the last Day‡*. Would we then know what our true State is, 'tis of unspeakable Importance not to rest in any Imaginations, either our own, or those of others; but to examine ourselves with the greatest Care, by that

* Rev. iii. 17. † 1 Cor. iv. 4. ‡ John xii. 48.

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unerring Standard, by which our eternal State must be decided at last. 'Tis probable that in general you think well of yourselves, and hope that it will be well with you for Eternity: but let me intreat you to consider, whether these Hopes are founded upon the Word of God, and a diligent Comparison of yourselves with it, attended with Watchfulness, and earnest Prayer against a Mistake; for without this, I may venture to pronounce your Thoughts of yourselves delusive, and your Hopes vain. We may infer further,

2. That an Acquaintance and Friendship with Christ, is indispensably necessary to our Admittance to his Kingdom.

If we are Strangers to him, unacquainted with any spiritual Intercourse with him, and destitute of a Principle of Love and Duty to him, he will certainly pronounce against us, at the great Day of his Coming, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.* Here then is a Subject for our most serious Inquiry; “What Acquaintance have I with Christ? “Have I been deeply convinced of my lost “State by Nature and Practice, and my indispensable Need of a Saviour? Has *the* “*Spirit received of Christ's, and shewn it unto* “*me* *? Have I seen an Excellence and “Glory in a crucified and exalted Re-

* John. xvi. 14.

“deemer,

“ deemer, that has drawn my Desires and
 “ Affections to him? Have I fled for Re-
 “ fuge to his Cross from the Guilt of Sin,
 “ and to the Throne of his Grace for his
 “ Spirit, to renew and sanctify me, and to
 “ form and strengthen me for his Service?
 “ Am I keeping up an Acquaintance with
 “ him, and panting after an Interest in his
 “ Love, and renewed Tokens of it from
 “ Time to Time? Am I coming to God
 “ through him, making it my abiding and
 “ supreme Concern to *be found in him* *, and
 “ studying in the general Bent of my Tem-
 “ per and Conduct, to obey his Commands
 “ without Exception, and to approve my-
 “ self in his Sight?” If we know nothing
 of such a Temper as this, we have no
 Room to expect any thing else, but that
 Christ should disown us at the great Day of
 his Coming: And how shall we be able to
 bear the Reflection, if it should be so? “I
 “ was told of this before-hand; I was
 “ taught that an Acquaintance and Friend-
 “ ship with Christ, was indispensably need-
 “ ful to my Admission to his Kingdom; I
 “ was warned of the Consequence of living
 “ estranged from him; and yet I continued
 “ to do so: how absurd and infatuated my
 “ Folly! and how insupportable, and hope-

* Phil. iii. 9.

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“ less the Ruin to which it has betrayed
“ me !” Once more we infer,

3. That the Distinction betwixt Saints and Sinners will remain, and produce the most important Consequences, when all other Distinctions cease for ever.

We see a lively Representation of it, in the different Treatment which the wise and foolish Virgins met with, from the Bridegroom, when enter'd to his nuptial Feast. The Day approaches, which shall destroy all the Distinctions that now engross the general Attention of Mortals; when the learned and unlearned shall no longer be known by those Characters; when the celebrated and the obscure, the rich and the poor, the mighty and the mean, the Prince and the Beggar, shall be thus distinguished no more: the Grave, and Judgment, and Eternity, will put an End to these temporary Differences. But there is a Distinction which shall survive all these, and others of the same trivial Nature, which shall then be perfected, and endure for ever; that, of the Friends and Servants of Christ, and of Strangers and Enemies to him; a Distinction which God himself will regard, which shall be proclaimed from the Tribunal of his Son before Men and Angels, and by which our eternal State shall be determined. How little therefore are the present

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sent Names of Honour ! how unworthy of Notice, the Terms of Contempt and Reproach, which are used for a few Days ! Let our Attention be fixed, and our Solitude awakened, by a Distinction of more important Consequence, and of a more durable nature.

Y

S E R-

S E R M O N XIII.

Watchfulness recommended as the
proper Improvement of the Para-
ble.

M A T T H. XXV. 13.

*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day
nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man
cometh.*

WE are now come to the close of this
awakening Parable, and of our Me-
ditations upon it, which have been, with
some Interruption, the Employment of many
past Sabbaths. Would to God that there
was Reason to hope, that Meditations of
the same nature, had been also the Em-
ployment of each of us many other Days,
while engaged in the necessary Affairs of the
World; and had led us to the Improve-
ment of the Parable to which our Lord
here directs, the utmost Watchfulness and
Care, that we may not be found at last
unprepared

unprepared for his Coming. Perhaps some present Impressions, have been made upon some of us, by the solemn Reflections to which we have been led; but it is evident in itself, and confirmed by frequent Experience and Observation, that things which make deep Impressions for the present, in innumerable Instances, produce no proportionable and abiding Effect; and that we are in Danger of resembling in this respect, *a Man beholding his natural Face in a Glass, who goes his Way, and straightway forgets what manner of Man he was* *. 'Tis possible to *receive the Word* either with Joy, or Fear, and yet have no Root in ourselves, and bring forth no correspondent Fruits; but our profiting by the Word of God, is far rather to be estimated, by the Effect it has upon our Temper and Conduct afterwards, than by the greatest temporary Impressions.

The Command, which the Lord Jesus gives in the Text, is of universal Concern: what he says to some, *he says to all, watch* †. Not only the aged, that are just dropping into the Grave, are bound to obey it; but the Young, amidst the flourishing Health, and Vivacity of Youth. Not only Sinners, who are in the utmost Danger for Eternity, have Need to watch; but the Saints themselves, who are Heirs of the Promise

* James, i. 23. 24.

† Mark xiii. 37.

of eternal Life, as they are yet encompassed with Enemies and Dangers. And the Reason with which the Command is enforced is alike just and cogent to all ; *for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.* Each of these demand our serious Attention, and I shall accordingly endeavour by divine Assistance to explain,

I. That Watchfulness which is here enjoined ; and,

II. The Argument by which it is enforced. I am,

I. To explain that Watchfulness which is here enjoined.

And it is evident, from the Solemnity of our appearing before Christ, from the Danger to which we are exposed, and from the nature of the Parable, to which this Charge is subjoined, that the Watchfulness commanded must extend both to our State and our Frame ; and be adapted to guard us against such Mistakes as may endanger our eternal Safety, and so sluggish and inactive a Disposition, as would render the Coming of Christ surprising and alarming to us. And as our Danger, in both respects, is great, 'tis not sufficient to watch in one or a few respects ; but a general Watchfulness

the proper Improvement of the Parable. 325
fulness is necessary to answer the Design of our Lord's Command, and to afford just Ground to hope for everlasting Happiness, and a comfortable Passage to the Enjoyment of it. It may therefore be justly supposed to include such things as these, Watch against Thoughtlessness and Carelessness, in a Matter of such vast Importance ---- against hoping on the Foundation of general Truths and Promises, without any Evidence of Interest in them ---- against indulging high Thoughts of yourselves, and your own Conduct ---- against judging of yourselves by inconclusive Evidences of Salvation ---- against the blinding and hardening Power of Custom in Sin ---- against Sloth and Formality in Christ's Service ---- and against overlooking any Part of your Duty or Danger.

I. Watch against Thoughtlessness and Carelessness, in a Matter of such vast Importance, as being prepared for the Coming of Christ.

'Tis the prevailing Disposition of Multitudes every where, to bestow no Thought, and give themselves no Concern about the Coming of Christ, and being *found of him in Peace* †: 'tis abundantly evident from their whole Temper and Conduct, that there is nothing further from their Thoughts, than that infinitely solemn Event, and the

† 2 Pet. iii. 14.

great Concern of Preparation for it. But O ye unhappy Creatures, who are in such a Case, reflect one Moment at least: Is it really a Matter of so little Consequence? or are you acting under the Influence of the most fatal Infatuation, while you so much disregard it? Is the Judgment to come, are Eternity, Heaven, and Hell, things of little Importance? Can you seriously consider their nature, and deliberately conclude that they are so? If your Liberty, your Possessions, your Reputation, and every thing you call precious were at Stake, would you regard the Decision as a little thing? If you were about to be tried for your Life, would you regard it as a trivial Concern, whether you were acquitted or condemned? and yet it would be so, in comparison with the great Concerns of Eternity. If then these Concerns are the most solemn and interesting imaginable, how indispensably requisite is it, to be solicitous to be delivered *from the Wrath to come* *, to be Heirs of eternal Life, and to know whether you are so or not! A variety of worldly Cares or Pleasures engross your Attention; a thousand wild Imaginations, and things vain and worthless as Bubbles and Shadows, waste your Thoughts and Time, while not a Moment's Attention is bestowed upon this great Question, what will become of your Souls, and

* Matth. iii. 7.

what will be your Doom for Eternity? O amazing Folly! which demands all the Attention and Efforts of the Soul to shake it off, and guard against it, and the most earnest Cries to God to deliver you out of it, and preserve you from relapsing into it.

Watch then against this shameful pernicious Thoughtlessness, which has plunged innumerable Multitudes into endless Perdition. Remember, and seek to fix your Attention upon the inconceivable Importance of your Acceptance before the Judge of the World, and apply yourselves to the most serious Inquiries, whether you have any Reason to expect it.

2. Watch against building your Hopes on general Truths and Promises, without any Evidence of your Interest in them.

An Acquaintance with Mankind, and frequent Converse with them on the Concerns of their Souls, and of the World to come, will furnish many alarming Instances of this nature. 'Tis a Truth of unspeakable Worth, that God is merciful, and ready to forgive the Guilt of returning Sinners: He has assured us of it, by the most gracious Promises, often repeated, and expressed in the strongest and most encouraging Terms: Were he not so, there could be no room for such guilty Creatures as we universally are, to entertain the least Hope of Salvation: But what will this avail those that

are going on obstinately, or carelessly in their Trespases; that are Strangers to sincere Repentance for Sin, to any earnest Application to divine Mercy for their Pardon, and to the Character of those to whom it is promised? What Advantage could a Rebel derive from the Clemency of a Prince, who had promised a Pardon to all that laid down their Arms, and petitioned for it, while the Wretch continued in his Rebellion, and refused to apply for Forgiveness? So vain also must the Hopes of these be, that flatter themselves on the Foundation of the Mercy of God, and his readiness to forgive, while they continue regardless of his Mercy, and persist in their Rebellions against him.

'Tis a Truth alike glorious and important to the eternal Salvation of Mankind, *that Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners* *: But what will it profit those who come not to him nor believe in him? Or how can that Salvation be perfected in those, in whom it is not begun, by their Deliverance from the Power and Dominion of Sin? As well might a Patient be healed by the Skill of a Physician, without applying to him, or using any of his Prescriptions; and as well might he expect his Cure to be completed, before the Force of the Disease was in the least abated. Would any of you trifle thus in Affairs that concern your Life

* 1 Tim. i. 15.

or Health? O trifle not then thus egregiously in Affairs unspeakably more momentous. Have you fled as ruin'd Sinners to a crucified Saviour as your only Hope? Have you earnestly sought that Salvation which he came to accomplish? Have you received him as he is offered in the Gospel, and yielded your Souls to his Direction and Orders? If not, imagine not that Christ's Coming to save Sinners will be of any important and eternal Benefit to you.

God has chosen his People to Salvation, through Sanctification of the Spirit, and Belief of the Truth; as the Apostle says of the Thessalonians, 2 Thess. ii. 13. but what will it avail a Soul, that is a Stranger to Sanctification of the Spirit, and that powerful influential Belief of the Truth, which the Gospel requires? The Saints are kept by the Power of God through Faith unto Salvation; as we are taught, 1 Pet. i. 5. but if we are estranged from the Character of the Saints, and from the Exercises and Fruits of Faith, and if we abuse the Promise of God, to the Indulgence of ourselves in Sin, or to the Neglect of a holy Fear and Watchfulness against it, we deceive ourselves, when we found our Expectations of Salvation, on this or other like gracious Assurances. There is a Rest remaining for the People of God; an Inheritance for the Saints in Light†; a Crown*

* Heb. iv. 9.

† Col. i. 12.

of Life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him †; but does it from thence follow, that you shall enter into that Rest, obtain that Inheritance, and receive that Crown? Most certainly no; except you bear the Characters of those to whom it is promised. There are splendid Houses, large Estates, and extensive Kingdoms in the World; but how absurd would it be, to conclude from thence that they were your's, without any Title to produce? and how justly would all the World call you Madmen if you did! Yet it is equally absurd to flatter yourselves, with the Expectation of a Part in the heavenly Inheritance, without any Evidence of an Interest in it.

There is no Truth more certain, than that *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord* §; and to build everlasting Hopes on other Truths, however certain and important, without this Evidence of our Interest in them, or any hearty Concern about it, must manifestly imply an Errour in the Conclusion, and is acting the Part of the highest and most destructive Folly: For nothing can be more evident, than that there must be a Connection betwixt Truths relative to Salvation, and the Salvation of our own Souls, if we ever obtain it; and the Scriptures plainly teach us what this Connection

† Jam. i. 12.

§ Heb. xii. 14.

must be; viz. a Principle of saving Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Work of the Spirit of God on our Hearts, teaching us to seek and serve him, and study continually to please him, and approve ourselves to him.

3. Watch against high Thoughts of yourselves and your own Conduct.

Pride blinds the Eyes of Men to their own Destruction, in innumerable Instances, and prevents their perceiving those Things in their own Behaviour, which every one else sees must end in Misery; nor can there be a more threatening Symptom of approaching Shame and Ruin. 'Tis thus in the Affairs of the present World; and there's Reason to fear, much more frequently so, in those of the World to come. A Person that thinks highly of himself, that sees little or nothing amiss in his own Temper and Conduct, and will not be persuaded to examine, whether it is agreeable to the sacred Rules of the Gospel, or whether his Hopes are such as have a just Foundation there; how awful a Symptom does he bear, of being in a most dangerous State, and in Ways that lead to Perdition! Jealousy of ourselves, and Circumspection in our whole Deportment, however disagreeable to corrupt Nature, is yet highly salutary. *A prudent Man foreseeth the Evil, and hideth himself: but the Simple pass on, and are punished;* according to
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the divine Instruction, *Prov.* xxii. 3. which, for the Solemnity and Importance of it, is repeated, *Prov.* xxvii. 12. Humility, Distrust of ourselves, and Attention to our own Ways in all their Variety, constitute an important Part of Wisdom, and are of the utmost Consequence to our everlasting Safety.

Watch then against the destructive Folly of determining to hope at all Adventures, and to entertain no Thoughts of yourselves or your own Ways, that might give you any Uneasiness. O how much more wise would it be, to be willing to bear the present Pain, which disagreeable Views of yourselves might give you, than to perish through the Folly, of resolving to keep up high Thoughts of yourselves, as long as possible. Seek to know the worst, with respect to your own State; and let no Evil pass unobserved, or without Humiliation for it, and Watchfulness, and earnest Cries to God, to have it utterly rooted out of your Hearts and Lives.

4. Watch against judging of yourselves by inconclusive Evidences of Salvation.

To judge and try ourselves with respect to our Title to eternal Life and Glory, is so obviously, both our great Duty and Interest, that one would imagine that scarce a Person should be found, who believes a future and everlasting State, that could neglect it, did
not

not constant Observation give us the utmost Reason to believe, that there's no Employment to which Mankind are in general greater Strangers. The Word of God repeatedly enjoins it; and indeed it is evident that without it, we shall lie open to a fatal Mistake. But if we are convinced of the Importance of doing it at all, it must also appear a Matter of the utmost Consequence, to judge of ourselves by such Marks, as shall be certain and decisive, and by no means to rest in any that are fallacious and inconclusive; especially as we know that we have an Enemy, who will endeavour to lead us into a Mistake; and as Multitudes around us confessedly, and probably many others secretly, build their eternal Hopes upon such Imaginations, as afford the justest Reason for Astonishment. I may venture to say, there is scarce any thing so slight, so trivial, so absurd, but that there are Instances of those, *whom the God of this World has so far blinded**, that they can build their Hopes of everlasting Salvation upon it.

I might mention a Variety of amazing Facts, in support of this Point, which have fallen under my own Observation, or which I have been credibly informed of. One flatters himself, that because he is poor and afflicted, he shall be happy in another World. Another argues just the reverse;

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

because

because God prospers him in this Life, therefore he is an Object of divine Love, and shall be happy in the Life to come. Another acknowledges a continued Course of Sin, yet persuades himself that his Sins are forgiven, and knows he shall go to Heaven when he dies, because he says his Prayers every Night. Another, at a Loss to think of more than one notorious Sin, that he has not been guilty of, hopes even on a Death-Bed itself, that God will be merciful to him, because he has not committed that one Sin. Do we wonder at such Infatuation, such amazing Folly of the human Mind in Matters of immense Consequence? Let us take heed that we also deceive not ourselves with things, if not equally absurd, yet equally inconclusive.

Perhaps your outward Behaviour is regular and becoming, and free from any remarkable Stain; yet venture not your eternal Hopes on so slight a Foundation: *For the Lord seeth not as Man seeth; for Man looks on the outward Appearance, but the Lord looks on the Heart* *. This seems to have been the Case, which our Lord intended to describe, by the Character of the foolish Virgins; and this was the Case of the *Pharisees* against whom he pronounces so many Woes, according to his Account of them, *Luke xi. 39. Now do ye Pharisees make clean*

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

the outside of the Cup and Platter: but your inward Part is full of Ravening and Wickedness: and again, Luke xvi. 15. Ye are they which justify yourselves before Men; but God knoweth your Hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among Men, is Abomination in the Sight of God.

Perhaps you are constant and diligent in attending upon divine Ordinances; though it is much to be wished, that even this could be said, of all that flatter themselves with the Hope of eternal Life: But remember that *a Name to live* † will stand you in no Stead, if you are estranged from a Principle of spiritual and divine Life itself. Even *Christ's own Hearers*, and those that *have eaten and drank in his Presence*, if they are found *Workers of Iniquity* ‡, must be sentenced to an everlasting Separation from him.

Perhaps you have embraced and zealously espoused some particular religious Principles, and are joined with such a Party of Christians, as you think maintain the purest Doctrine or Worship: But if it be so indeed, yet remember what the Apostle says, *Rom. i. 18. For the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven, against all Ungodliness, and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness.* The more perfect Ideas you have of the Truth, and of

† Rev. iii. 1. ‡ Luke xiii. 26. 27.

the Purity of Worship ; so much the more inexcusable will you be, and the Wrath of God so much the more dreadfully revealed against you, if the Truth you profess has not its proper Influence on your Hearts and Lives, and the pure Forms of Worship you maintain, are destitute of that Spirituality, in which the Excellence of Worship consists. And remember that solemn Admonition of our Lord's in the Parable of the Tares among the Wheat, *Matt. xiii. 30.* *Let both grow together until the Harvest: and in the Time of the Harvest, I will say to the Reapers, Gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them: but gather the Wheat into my Barn.* So little will it avail to be joined with the People of God, if you are estranged from that blessed Character.

Perhaps you have formerly had great Convictions, and solemn Impressions of everlasting Things ; but our Lord tells us of those *who bear the Word, and anon with Joy receive it, and yet have no Root in themselves**. Such was the case of *Felix*, who trembled while Paul reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and the Judgment to come : but who never appears to have sent for him with any Desire of hearing such things any more ; or to have heard him with any Impressions, when he sent for him afterwards. Such also

* *Math. xiii. 20, 21.*

was the Case of *Herod*, of whom we are told, *Mark vi. 20.* that when he heard *John the Baptist* he did many Things, and heard him gladly; and yet not only afterwards lost those Impressions, but proceeded so far as to destroy his faithful Instructor and Monitor; and too many other Facts evince this melancholy Truth, that there may be many Conversions, where yet there is no Conversion from Sin to God.

Perhaps you practise secret and Family Duties; though an Acquaintance with Mankind will furnish Instances in Abundance, where a confident Hope of Salvation is maintained, without any Regard to them: But are *your Souls following hard after God** in them? Are you earnestly seeking Nearness to him, growing Conformity to his Image, and Fellowship with the Father, and his Son *Jesus Christ †*? Without this, your Acts of secret or social Worship lose their Worth, and will avail you nothing. *The Hour cometh, and now is*, says our Lord, *when the true Worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him ‡*: and such only will he reckon true Worshipers, and to such Worship alone will he have Regard.

Watch therefore against judging of yourselves by these, or any other inconclusive

* Psal. lxxiii. 8.

† 1 John i. 3.

‡ John iv. 25.

Marks of Salvation ; and try yourselves by such Evidences as the Word of God has proposed. Ask yourselves then, “ Have I “ been deeply convinced of Sin ?” for this is the first Work which the blessed Spirit was promised to accomplish §. “ Have I “ come in earnest to Christ as my only Sa- “ viour ?” for such has he promised that *he will not cast out* ||. “ Have I cordially re- “ ceived him, as he is proclaimed in the “ Gospel ?” for to such *has he given Power to become the Sons of God* ¶. “ Am I born again, and become a new Creature in Christ * ?” for he has declared, that *except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God* †. “ Am I earnestly and conscientiously seek- “ ing to serve and follow Christ ?” for he has pronounced, *that where he is, there also shall his Servant be* ‡. “ Have I respect unto “ all God’s Commandments, and do I hate every “ false Way † ?” for this was the Psalmist’s Evidence of the Sincerity of his own Heart towards God. These and other like Evi- dences, with which the Word of God a- bounds, cannot deceive you ; but such as have no other Foundation, than your own Imaginations, or those of self-deceiving Multitudes around you, will leave you under a most fatal Delusion.

§ John xvi. 8.

|| John vi. 37.

¶ John i. 12.

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

† John iii. 3.

‡ John xii. 26.

† Psal. cxix. 6, 104, 128.

5. Watch against the blinding hardening Power of Custom in Sin.

The habitual and allowed Practice of any Sin, whether open or secret, whether more or less flagrant, as it is in itself, an awful Evidence that the Soul *is yet in the Gall of Bitterness and Bond of Iniquity* ||; so it has a fatal Influence, to blind the Eyes of the Mind and harden the Heart, to prevent the Sinner's discerning his Danger, and keep him from any Concern about it. The habitual Sinner gradually wears off all Tenderness and Sensibility of Conscience, and is in Danger of being so far blinded, as to persuade himself that there's little or no Evil, even in Crimes of the most atrocious nature. The Spirit of God is more and more grieved and quenched*, and provoked to say, *let him that is filthy, be filthy still; let him that is unjust, be unjust still* †. There is scarce a more insensible Creature upon Earth, than one that has long accustomed himself to the Practice of Sin; especially, if it has been under a Cloak and Disguise of Religion: all the Alarms of the Word and Providence of God, and all the Admonitions of his Servants are lost upon him; his Heart is *hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin* ‡, and withstands every Method that can be used

|| Acts viii. 23.
† Rev. xxi. 11.

* Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thess. v. 19.
‡ Heb. iii. 13.

to soften it. O dread the Thought of a blinded feared Conscience, and the Practice of Sin, which has the strongest Tendency to bring it into so deplorable a Case.

6. Watch against Sloth and Formality in the Service of Christ.

As the former Admonitions have been most immediately directed to unconverted Sinners; so this, and that which follows, are most immediately directed to the People of God; though both the one, and the other, may have their Use to both. Have any of us indeed chosen Christ's Service for our Employment? Have we not only taken up a Profession of Religion, but made Religion itself the Object of our cordial Choice, and the great Business of Life? yet we also have need of our Lord's solemn Charge to watch; and so much the more, as we find the wise Virgins slumbering as well as the foolish: and who that knows his own Heart, does not find constant Danger of doing so too? Perhaps we keep up a constant Course of sacred Duties, and durst not, for the World, live in the Neglect of them: But do we not in innumerable Instances, in Effect, slumber and sleep in them? Where is the Spirituality? Where is the devout Affection? Where is the holy Ardour and Converse with God, that might be expected to attend them? Where is the Vigilance becoming

our Character as the Servants of Christ, and answerable to the Variety of Snares and Dangers that surround us? Where is our Diligence and Care, to improve every Opportunity that Providence affords us, of doing and getting Good? Where is our Watchfulness against the Vanity of our own Minds, and our deplorable Propensity to Earth and Sense? To us also does the Lord Jesus address this solemn Charge to watch.

7. Watch against overlooking any Part of your Duty or Danger.

The great Adversary of our Souls does us unspeakable Injury, by making us unmindful both of the one and the other. The Psalmist had such a Sense of the Propensity of human Nature to the former, and of the unhappy Consequences that must attend it, that he earnestly prays to be preserved from it, *Psal. cxix. 19. I am a Stranger in the Earth, hide not thy Commandments from me.* Let us also, who are, certainly, at least, equally liable to it, often offer the same Request to God, and at the same Time watch; lest while we profess a Concern to be universally obedient to Christ's Commandments, and as far as we can judge of ourselves, are sincere in that Profession, we should in Fact forget and consequently neglect any of them.

The Watchfulness here enjoined necessarily implies too, taking heed not to overlook any Part of our Danger. There are

Corruptions working in the Heart, and often gaining deplorable Advantages without being perceived; Snares that surround us, and Devices which our Enemy is practising against us, the mischievous Nature of which is not presently observed. In how many Instances have we seen others, that appeared to be amazingly blinded, with respect to great Dangers they were in, and the mischievous Tendency of Steps they have taken? And are we less liable to the same Blindness? And have we not need of the utmost Watchfulness, lest their Case should be our own? We are therefore directed to *walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but as wise* *; and to *watch and pray that we enter not into Temptation* †. In particular, it highly concerns us to watch diligently, against the dangerous Propensity we may easily perceive in ourselves, to be forgetful of the Coming of Christ, or to regard it as yet at a great Distance, when perhaps *it is near, even at the Door* ‡. This is an Evil productive of so many others, and the Character of Christ's Servants is so expressly represented in the Scriptures, as that of those who look for his Coming; that if we desire to shun those Evils, or lay sure Hold on the Blessings of that Character, and to be animated to constant Diligence and Ardour in his Service, 'tis of the utmost Im-

* Eph. v. 15. † Matth. xxvi. 41. ‡ Matth. xxiv. 33.

portance to be always watchful over ourselves in this respect.

Such is the Import of the Watchfulness our Lord here enjoins, and we now proceed to attend,

II. To the solemn Consideration by which he inforces it, *Ye know not the Day, nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

Every reasonable Creature must assent to the manifest Truth of our Lord's Words: But this is not sufficient to produce the End, for which they were spoken; let us seek to enter into the solemn Significance of them, and to have them deeply engraven on our Hearts. We know not whether our Lord's Coming, shall be soon, or long delayed --- gradual, or sudden ---- or in what Temper and Employment it shall find us.

I. We know not whether the Coming of Christ shall be soon, or long delayed.

We often see those, that had just before been flattering themselves that it was at a great Distance, speedily summoned to appear before him. Such was the Case of the rich Man in our Lord's Parable, *Luke xii. 19. &c.* He said to his Soul, *Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee; then whose shall those Things be*

which thou hast provided? and in innumerable other Instances, Man's reckoning and God's, with respect to the Time of Christ's Coming, are thus widely different. Man counts upon many Years to come, when the God of his Life has determined, that it shall not be prolonged so much as to another Day. 'Tis a Secret in the Breast of infinite Wisdom; whether we are to see decrepit Age, or lie down in the Dust, and our immortal Spirits begin their Eternity, in a few Years, or Days, or Hours. Perhaps the Seeds of Death in us are just arrived at Maturity, and all our Hopes, and Prospects, and Designs for the present Time, are just ready to be cut off. Perhaps another Week may find this Flesh slumbering in the Grave, and these Souls unalterably fixed in the World of Spirits. Perhaps we are even this Moment upon the very Verge of Eternity. How great then is the Need of Watchfulness, and how wise and important the Charge to maintain it.

2. We know not whether our Lord will come gradually or suddenly.

The carnal Heart presumes it shall have Warning to be prepared to meet him; but how many Instances of the contrary, has every one seen or heard of, that has spent many Years in the World! It is a Secret equally impene-
trable with that of the Time of our Lord's Coming, whether it shall be with respect
to

to us, after frequent Warnings given, by repeated Shocks of this earthly Tabernacle, or whether it shall fall into Ruins in a Moment; whether the lingering Consumption, the gradual Fever, the sudden Apoplexy, or some instantaneous Accident, shall be the Messenger to summon us to his Tribunal. We are busied about our worldly Affairs; we eat, we drink, we converse with our Friends, and perhaps the next Moment stand before the Judge of the whole Earth. Startling Thought in general, even to the Soul prepared for its great Change; but how just an Object of Terrour to those that are regardless of it. Watch, therefore, says the Lord of Glory; Watch, O my Soul, let all that have one Spark of Wisdom say too; every Day, every Hour, every Moment watch.

3. We know not in what Temper and Employment the Coming of Christ shall find us.

The profane Sinner is, indeed, generally in the same Temper with respect to this great Event, always forgetful and regardless of it: except perhaps, when on some extraordinary Occasion, Conviction flashes upon his Mind; but at all other Times, intent upon the Pursuit of his Lusts, and rushing on in a full Career of Sin. Perhaps on the other Hand, here and there a Christian may be found of exemplary Piety and eminent Spirituality, that walks closely with God from
Day

Day to Day, and maintains a constant glorious Degree of Watchfulness and Heavenly-mindedness; but in general the Variety, in the Temper and Conduct of the Professors of Religion, and of sincere Christians themselves is great. Sometimes they are in a serious, thoughtful Disposition; at other Times, vain, careless, and forgetful: Sometimes diligent and active; at other Times, negligent and sluggish: Sometimes spiritual in Duty, and the Temper of their Minds heavenly, where the Heart is right with God; at other Times, shamefully cold and remiss. We know not in which of these different Dispositions, the Coming of Christ shall find us. Most important, therefore, is the Admonition of our Lord to watch; and may his own Grace write it in indelible Characters on every Heart, never to be, a Moment, forgotten.

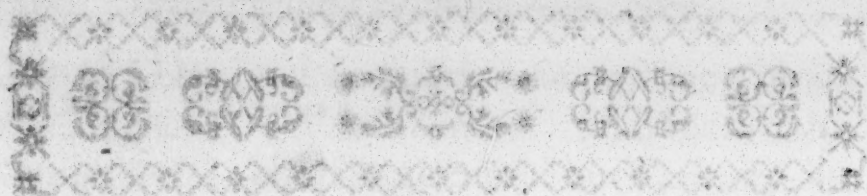
THREE



THREE
SERMONS
ON
Personal and Family-Religion.
PREACHED AT
WAREHAM in DORSETSHIRE.

By S. READER.

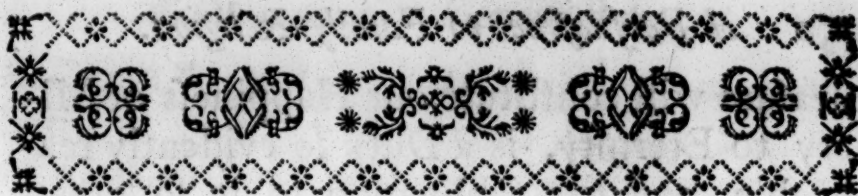




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S E R M O N I.

A

Persuasive to PERSONAL and FAMILY-
RELIGION.

J O S H U A, XXIV. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD,
choose you this Day whom you will serve, whe-
ther the Gods which your Fathers served,
that were on the other Side of the Flood,
or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose Land
ye dwell: But as for me and my House, we
will serve the LORD.*



O worship and serve the eternal
God, that made us, that supports
us every Moment, and crowns us
with Loving-kindness and tender Mer-
cies *, in whose Hand our Breath is, and whose
are all our Ways †, at whose Tribunal we must
speedily appear, and whose Favour or Dis-

* Psal. ciii. 4.

† Dan. v. 23.

pleasure will constitute our Happiness or Misery to Eternity, is a Duty so evidently reasonable, and the Obligation to it so great, that one would imagine scarce a Person or Family should be found, especially under all the Light of the Gospel, that had not a Regard to it; or, that if any such were found, they should be viewed with general Horrour, as Monsters in Nature, that had divested themselves of the first Principles which Reason dictates, and Prodigies of Wickedness and Hardness of Heart. But Oh how many such Prodigies are every where found! and how frequent the Case, dreadful as it is! 'Tis no longer a strange Spectacle, because a most common one; and the Multitudes of Persons and Families that live without the Worship of God, keep one another in Countenance, and make each other easy under the Guilt of it, by its general Prevalence. But the more common it is, so much the more terrible in itself, so much the more threatening a Symptom of impending Wrath, and so much the greater Need is there, that the Servants of God should cry aloud, and exert themselves to the utmost, to rouse Men from so sad a State.

I shall, therefore, this Day, by divine Assistance, endeavour to second the important Step which has just been taken, in distributing among you an earnest Persuasive to Family-Religion;

Religion *; and importunately intreat you, both to give up yourselves to the Service of God in your personal Capacities, and to set up the Worship of God in your Families, where it has not been hitherto practised. I am well assured that such Intreaties, with respect to many of your Families, are not necessary; but that the Worship of God is, and has been long maintained there; and I hope it is so in some Families where it is not generally known, as I have on Inquiry, sometimes had the Pleasure to find that it was in some Families, where I was doubtful of it. But I would solemnly address those, that yet live in the Neglect of this most reasonable and important Duty, in these animated Words of *Joshua*, *If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose you this Day whom you will serve: But as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord:* And I doubt not that many that hear me, concur in the most cordial and determined manner in this solemn Engagement.

It may be observed, that *Joshua* takes it for granted, that the Israelites would serve some God; that if they renounced the Worship of the God of Israel, they would not be so atheistical as to serve none at all;

* This and the following Discourse were delivered, the Sabbath after a Distribution had been made to every Family in the Congregation, of Dr. *Doddridge's* Address to the Master of a Family, on the important Subject of Family-Religion.

but

ut would serve, either the gods which their Fathers had served, beyond the River *Euphrates* in *Mesopotamia*, before the calling of *Abraham*, or those, which the Nations, whom they had dispossessed, served, though both were utterly unworthy of the Name of gods: Even Idolaters may shame those who live without the Worship of God, and the Regard which some of them had for their household gods, may shame those who live without the Worship of God in their Families.

In discoursing on these Words I propose,

I. To inquire on what Accounts, it may be supposed to seem evil, to any, to serve the Lord.

II. To press you to make your choice upon this Head.

III. To explain the Import of the solemn Determination which is here made; and,

IV. To conclude with several Exhortations relative to the Subject. I am,

I. To inquire on what Accounts it may be supposed to seem evil, to any, to serve the Lord.

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By its seeming evil, is not to be understood its appearing morally evil or sinful: none can be imagined to entertain so absurd and contradictory a Thought, concerning serving God in general; nor indeed scarce concerning Family-Religion. And though the Tempter sometimes suggests to Souls under Discouragements, that their Prayers will be an Abomination; a Suggestion never to be hearkened to, but to be resisted with the utmost Indignation, when urged as a Reason for the Neglect of Prayer; yet it is evident, that is not the Case here supposed. By its seeming evil to serve the Lord, is then evidently intended its seeming disagreeable, and not to be chosen. But that it should thus seem evil to any is inexpressibly amazing and melancholy, and an awful Evidence of the dreadful Corruption of our Natures; and yet it is manifest from the Practice of many, that it does thus seem evil to them to serve God at all, and especially to serve him by maintaining his worship in their Families. And it may be supposed to seem so, as appearing unnecessary----as being contrary to the Bent and Disposition of their Hearts----as taking up too much of their Time----as requiring the Mortification of their Lusts----as exposing them to Observation and profane Scoffs----and as attended with Difficulties which they know not how to surmount.

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1. Some seem to think it evil to serve the Lord, as unnecessary.

To this absurd and impious Thought, those extravagant Apprehensions of the unbounded Mercy of God, on which Multitudes build all their Hopes, plainly lead. While they can flatter themselves that God will be merciful to them, let them live in almost any manner that they please, without any Regard to him, or Concern to be approved of him; the Service of God must consequently appear to them unnecessary. What need have men to watch, and pray, and labour; *to deny themselves*, mortify the Flesh, *and take up their Cross and follow Christ*†, if they may obtain Mercy without it? And this shews in a very strong Light, the dreadful Tendency of such Apprehensions of the unlimited Mercy of God. Though indeed scarce any will be so daring, as openly to declare it unnecessary to serve God at all; yet with respect to the particular Acts of his Service, their Practice, and sometimes their Words, shew that they regard them as unnecessary. They flatter themselves, and will sometimes acknowledge, that they think Men may go to Heaven without so much ado as some make about Religion. This serves to excuse their Neglect of Prayer, of examining their own Hearts, or doing any thing in Religion, except perhaps some of the most common

† Matth. xvi. 24.

Acts of Worship or social Duties. They think they serve God enough, if they attend upon publick Ordinances on the Lord's Day, and maintain any tolerable Degree of Justice and Uprightness in their Dealings with Men; but with respect to secret or Family-Prayer, or any Exercises of Religion in common Time, they see no Need of them. Such is the dreadful Disposition of fallen Man: Religion, which would be his Glory and his Happiness, is so much his Burden that he determines to have no more of it, than he imagines absolutely necessary to shelter him from eternal Destruction.

Sometimes Sinners seem to take Encouragement in their Negligence of Religion, from the Bounties of Providence to those that live, like themselves, *without God in the World* †. As they see many of this Character flourish in Life, and as this is the great Object of their own Ambition; they are ready to imagine such Persons the happiest, and the most favoured of Heaven; thus judging of the Favour of God by the outward Dispensations of his Providence, contrary to the Declarations of his Word, that *no Man knoweth Love or Hatred by all that is before him; that all Things come alike to all* *; that Sinners *receive their good Things in their Life-time* †;

† Eph. ii. 12. * Eccl. ix. 1, 2. † Luke xvi. 25.

and that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth* †.

But to such Imaginations, and every thing else that can be pleaded against the Necessity of minding Religion well, that Word of our Lord is a full Answer, *Luke x. 42. One Thing is needful.* Whatever Sinners may flatter themselves with, the Day is at hand, when it will appear to have been the most needful of all things to serve God, and nothing to have been necessary in comparison with it. If any of you are conscious to yourselves, of such secret Thoughts as these which have been mentioned, let your Children be supposed to argue with respect to their Duty to you, as you do with respect to your's to the blessed God; "My Parents are too affectionate to cast me out of their Favour, whether I take any notice of them or not; they will provide me Food and Raiment, whether I please them or not: disobedient Children are provided for as well as the obedient: 'tis therefore unnecessary to shew any Regard to them, or concern myself to please them." You would immediately see the Folly and Wickedness of such Reasoning in them towards you, and soon make them know the Importance of your Displeasure. And is it not equally foolish and wicked, for any in the same manner to excuse themselves

† Heb. xii. 6.

from the Duties of Religion, from Prayer, from the Mortification of Sin, from worshipping God in their Families, as if it was unnecessary? Is it unnecessary for you to call upon God, for the Mercies that you and your Families want, and to acknowledge him in those you receive? 'tis then evidently as unnecessary for your Children to ask you for what they want, or shew any Gratitude for it when they receive it; and while you expect that they should do it, you condemn yourselves, if you live without the Acknowledgment of God, in the Mercies which you and your Families receive. Is it unnecessary that your Families should be educated for God, and taught his Service by your Example? Is it unnecessary to take any Steps to keep them from eternal Destruction, and lead them to Heaven? But what Steps can possibly be taken, with the least reasonable Prospect of Success, if you do not acknowledge God among them, and entreat his Blessing upon them? And let me add, you may justly expect that Families without Religion should be also Families without a Blessing; which you manifestly treat as unnecessary, while you neglect to ask it.

2. It seems evil to many to serve the Lord, as being contrary to the Bent and Disposition of their Hearts.

The natural Language of Sinners, with respect to the blessed God, is like that of

those rebellious Citizens, *Luke*, xix. 14. *We will not have this Man to reign over us: or like that of Pharaoh, Exod. v. 2. Who is the Lord, that I should obey his Voice?* The Hearts of unconverted Sinners, under the Gospel, as well as those that are destitute of this Privilege, are absolutely averse to the Service of God; they have no Disposition towards it, nor Relish for it; but on the contrary an utter Dislike to it, and all further Exercises of it than those which are customary, and from which they cannot well excuse themselves, without making themselves observed as remarkably irreligious. One might as well attempt to persuade a Person, who is averse to travelling, to go into a foreign Land where he conceives he has no Business; or a Husbandman, Artificer, or Tradesman, to leave his present Employment, and apply himself to another, to which he has always had a Dislike, and from which he expects no Advantage; or press the unlearned, who have spent a considerable Part of Life without any Relish for Literature, or the least Apprehensions of any Use or Entertainment to arise from it, to learn some unknown Language, or study Philosophy; as speak to Multitudes of serving God, keeping his Commandments, and praying to him in secret and in their Families.

I earnestly wish that there may not be found any among us, who notwithstanding
all

all that has been offered to them in the Pamphlets that have been dispersed among them, and what now is and further may be this Day offered, will yet have no Thoughts of applying themselves to the Service of God, and setting it up in their Families; because their Hearts are wholly averse to it, and Religion so strange and insipid a thing to them, that they cannot tell how to reconcile themselves to the Thought of attending to it. But if there are any such that hear me, let me entreat you to consider how sad the Case of that Creature must necessarily be, whose Heart is averse to the Service of his great Creator, who likes any thing that presents itself better than this, and cannot be persuaded by any Motives or Entreaties to apply himself to it. What a dreadful Degree of Hardness of Heart does it discover, and how awful a Symptom is it of approaching Ruin! Religion is not, in itself, such a tasteless and unpleasant thing as it appears to Sinners. *Wisdom's Ways are, on the contrary, Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace* *. Multitudes have found the sweetest Entertainment in them, that they have ever tasted in their whole Lives. Religion has enhanced the Pleasure of the several Comforts of Life, and softened and blessed its Sorrows. If you have, therefore, no Relish for it, it proceeds from a most

* Prov. iii. 17.

dangerous Disease of your Souls, which ought to give you a greater Alarm, than if you had lost the Relish of your Food, and contracted an Aversion to it; and it is a Crime which, without recovering Grace, must for ever exclude you from the Kingdom of God. How can those hope for Heaven, which is a State of eternal Worship, or imagine it possible for them to be happy there, if they could be admitted into it, who cannot relish the Worship and Service of God upon Earth? 'Tis indispensably necessary that you should learn, by the Grace of God, to love Religion now, if you would ever join the blessed Assembly of Saints above, or enter upon that holy *Rest which remains for the People of God* †. Oh that you could be persuaded to attend to it in earnest, and you would soon find, that there is nothing able to produce such Consolation, and so much adapted to make a Creature truly and greatly happy! But this leads me to add,

3. It seems evil to many to serve the Lord, as taking up too much of their Time. This Difficulty takes its Rise from the foregoing: The carnal Heart says of the Service of God, like those Sinners, *Mal. i. 13. What a Weariness is it? and snuffs at it*; and therefore excuses itself from it by the Pretence of wanting Time for it. Religion seems to many the peculiar Employment

† Heb. iv. 9.

of the Sabbath, and wholly to be confined to it; and Multitudes can find something else to do even then, and excuse themselves from the Employments of it on God's holy Day itself. But on other Days, they take it for granted, that it would intrude upon their Business, and therefore they satisfy themselves in the Neglect of it.

But let me ask you, Cannot you, do you not find Time every Day, for your Meals, and your Sleep? and is not the Service of God, as necessary to be attended to as the Refreshments of Nature? Your own Souls and those of your Families, are more precious than the Body, their Concerns are greater, and require your Regard in preference to those of the mortal Flesh. Can you acquit yourselves of wasting Time in idle Chat, in vain Amusements, in doing nothing, or that which is worse than nothing? and if you cannot, with what Pretence can the Want of Time be pleaded to excuse your Neglect of the Service of God in secret and in your Families? I am confident there are but few Circumstances, if any, in the common course of Things, in which a Soul thoroughly disposed for the Service of God, might not, with due Care and prudent Contrivance, redeem at least half an Hour for secret and Family-Worship in the Morning, and again in the Evening. If you take it out of your Sleep, or the Time allotted for your Meals;
if

if it is redeemed from the Amusements of Visits or Chat; yet let Time be found for your Duty to God, as the most Important Concern of Life; and Time thus employed, in a truly spiritual manner, will turn to the richest Account, and have its happy Influence on the wise, honourable, comfortable, and successful Management of all your other Affairs.

4. Some seem to think it evil to serve the Lord, as requiring the Mortification of their Lusts.

'Tis much to be apprehended, that this is in reality the true Ground on which many refuse to engage in the Duties of Religion. They are conscious to themselves, that their chosen Course would be shamefully inconsistent with them, and particularly with secret and Family Prayer. If they are in any Degree enlightened, they are sensible they have other Things to ask of God, besides daily Provision and the daily Care of his Providence: They can scarce come to him without asking the Pardon of Sin, Strength against it, an Interest in his Favour, and the Salvation of their Souls; but they are convinced that their daily Conduct stands in Opposition to such Petitions as these: they are therefore ashamed to ask, what they know that they are not in earnest seeking; to beg the Forgiveness of Sin, and Strength against it, when they cannot resolve to forsake

fake it; or to entreat that Favour, and Salvation, which they have no Disposition to seek in any other manner. Perhaps they have been sometimes so far alarmed as to begin to pray, and the Remonstrances of Conscience against the rest of their Conduct, have been thereby so much strengthened, that they determine to seek some present Ease, by returning to their former Neglect. This Objection against secret Prayer, has yet greater Effect to prevent their engaging in Family-Worship, because then their several Domestics, would be so many Witnesses of the Inconsistency of their Behaviour with their Prayers; and the guilty Conscience can easily suppose Children or Servants to think, that which they dare not utter. The Sinner, therefore, with a kind of dreadful Deliberation, determines to neglect this Duty, which would be both in his own Breast, and the Breasts of his Family, a constant Reproach upon his beloved Lusts.

But in what Language shall I address such unhappy Creatures? in what Terms sufficiently forcible shall I express the Guilt, the Madness, the immense Danger of that Soul, which thus coolly prefers the Service of Sin to the Service of God? Do you indeed believe the reality of that eternal World, which such a Struggle in your own Minds seems to suppose? Why then does not that Belief prevail

vail to lead you to a contrary Choice, and a fixed Determination, and earnest Endeavour, by the Assistance of divine Grace, to abandon these Lusts which you thus basely resolve to retain? Which will you wish on a Death-Bed, on the Verge of Judgment and Eternity, that you had preferred? the Service of God, or the Indulgence of your Lusts? and how will you stand before your eternal Judge, when it shall be charged upon you, that upon deliberating the Matter you chose the detestable Slavery of Sin, before the Blessings of his Service? Your Case is far worse than theirs, who never think any thing of the Necessity of serving God in these important Duties; and your Condemnation must be proportionably dreadful. Oh seek to correct the horrid Choice, I beseech you, before it is too late, and abandon those execrable Lusts that thus hinder you from serving God, and must plunge you into such an Abyfs of Wo.

5. It seems evil to some to serve the Lord, as exposing them to Observation and profane Scoffs.

This Suggestion the Tempter employs when Conscience is so much awakened, that it cannot easily be quieted again in a total Neglect of the Service of God. Any new religious Exercises, to which a Person has not been accustomed, can scarce be entered upon and continued, without being observed
by

by others around him, especially by his most intimate Friends and Companions, and perhaps they are such, as will make them the Object of their Contempt and Ridicule. The Temptation is strengthened by the Necessity of avoiding Ostentation, and Satan industriously endeavours, to lead Men to consider every Thing in that Light, from which he would dissuade them, when that Temptation is most likely to succeed. The Worship of God in Families, where it has not been hitherto maintained, cannot indeed be set up, without being observed by the several Members of them, and perhaps also by such of their Acquaintance as will be ready to scoff at such a Novelty.

But let it be seriously remembered, that if you ever desire to enter into the Kingdom of God, you must be Persons of another Spirit, and of a different Conduct, from the Generality of Mankind around you: And which is to be chosen, to miss of the Glory of that eternal Kingdom, or to be exposed to the Observation, and Scorn of your Fellow-Creatures for pursuing it? The blessed God will distinguish his Servants by his Favour; and will not that be an abundant Compensation, for all the contemptuous Treatment you may possibly meet with from Mortals? How many of God's Servants are diligent and constant in his Service, and particularly maintain secret and Family-Worship,

neither seeking to be observed of Men, nor ashamed if they are? unmoved, if they are made the Objects of Mockery and Contempt; yet indeed but little exposed to it, but rather gaining the Esteem and Veneration of Sinners themselves, by their becoming Steadfastness, and the Consistency of their whole Conduct with the Duties they practise? Will it not then be a sad Sign that your Hearts are not right with God, if you are deterred from his Service, by the Fear of Observation and Reproach? and must it not expose you to the Terrour of that Declaration of the Lord Jesus, *Mark, viii. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels?*

6. It seems evil to some to serve the Lord, as being attended with Difficulties which they know not how to surmount.

Perhaps some of you are convinced of the Necessity of Personal, and the Importance of Family-Religion, and yet hesitate about applying yourselves to it, discouraged by the Obstacles that appear in the Way. Hitherto you have associated yourselves with Sinners, and you know not how to shake off their Company: But are they really valuable Friends and eligible Companions? Have they not led you into innumerable Sins and Follies,

Follies, which have wounded your Consciences, and done you unspeakable Injury? Have they ever done you any important Service? and would they not desert you, when reduced to Distress and Misery by hearkening to their Enticements, as others of like Character have often done to those that have been seduced by them? Or supposing that they have done you any friendly Offices; are these of sufficient Importance to be compared with the Evils into which they have led, or yet may lead you, and with the Injury they will do you now, if they are the Hindrances of your devoting yourselves to the Service of God? Remember that divine Declaration, *He that walketh with wise Men, shall be wise; but a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed**: *For sake therefore the foolish and live, and go in the Way of Understanding†*.

'Tis difficult to break the Habits of Sin which you have unhappily contracted; nor will it indeed be done without a deep Sense of its indispensable Necessity. Remember then what Wounds Sin has given you already, what Good it has deprived you of, and to what Misery it has exposed you. Remember the tremendous Threatenings of a holy God against it, and the Certainty with which they will be executed, upon every obstinate Sinner. Think what Agonies, you

* Prov. xiii. 20.

† Prov. ix. 6.

may justly expect that conscious Guilt will produce on a Death-Bed, and how you shall stand before your eternal Judge, if you continue in Rebellion against him. And is the Difficulty of forsaking a Course of Sin, a Consideration worthy to be compared with these? Perhaps you flatter yourselves that a favourable Moment may arrive, in which it may be more easy to do it: Most improbable Hope! Sin strengthens still more and more by Custom, and every renewed Act of it further strengthens the Habit, renders it more difficult to be broken, and increases your Danger of dying in your Sins. Begin your Warfare, therefore, against Sin immediately; watch against all the Occasions of it, and Temptations to it, and seek to suppress the first Struggles of it within; but especially *go forth in the Strength of the Lord* †, with earnest constant Cries for the Aids of all-sufficient Grace to give you the Victory over it.

Hitherto you have been such Strangers to Religion, that you know not how to set about it: apply then to some faithful Minister, or seek Acquaintance with some that know the Lord, and have been long engaged in his Service; they will be ready, with the utmost Pleasure, to direct and assist you in the Paths of Duty, as far as lies in their Power; or should you not meet with the Assistance you expected, from the Persons

† Psal. lxxi. 16.

to whom you first apply, renew your Attempts, to join yourselves with such as will rejoice to be Friends to your Souls, for many such there are in the World, though few in comparison with others; study the Word of God, and converse with the Writings of his Servants, in which you will find important Directions and animating Motives to the great Work before you; and especially, cry earnestly to God for his Spirit to teach you; and though you should be at a loss how to express yourselves before him, he understands the broken Language of a Heart that is panting after him: even Sighs and Groans have a Meaning perfectly intelligible to him, which he will not despise: Set yourselves in earnest to his Service, according to the best Conceptions you yet have, or can form concerning it, and his Spirit will teach and assist you. *Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach Sinners in the Way.*

Perhaps some of you, who dare not live in a total Disregard of Religion, yet have your great Difficulties with respect to Family-Worship. Perhaps you wish your Families were like those where it is maintained; but you are discouraged from it, by an apprehension that it requires greater Abilities than yours: But are not the Persons that are to join with you in it, for the most Part, if

* Psal. xxv. 8.

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not wholly, your nearest Relatives, your Wives or Children, or perhaps your Servants? are they not your Inferiours in other respects, and Persons, in general, at most but upon a Level with you, as to their Abilities and Education? Do you not daily converse with them? And are you confounded at any Improproprieties which escape you in that daily Conversation? and may not such Thoughts as these, justly take off the Edge of the Temptation, that would hinder you from speaking to the blessed God before them, both on their Behalf and your own? I hope some of you do sometimes address yourselves to him before them, particularly at your Meals; and it is but a little longer Address, which you are called to offer to him, with them and for them. Perhaps some of them are secretly wishing, that you would afford them this Advantage, and lament the want of it, to whom any supposeable Imperfection would be no Objection; and remember that encouraging Word of the Apostle's, *Rom. viii. 26, Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our Infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh Intercession for us, with Groanings that cannot be uttered.* But supposing the worst, that any of you are so unhappy, as to have Persons in your Families, who you fear would be Scoffers, either at the Duty itself, or your manner of performing

forming it; endeavour first to convince them of the Reasonableness, the Obligation, and Advantage of it; and, if they appear upon the whole to be incorrigible, either expel them from your Houses if possible, or maintain the Worship of God with such Members of your Families, who will be ready, or whom you can oblige to attend it in a becoming manner: and the exclusion of a Scoffer, may perhaps become the happy Means of bringing him to Thoughtfulness, and of reclaiming him from his Guilt. These and other Difficulties which appear formidable beforehand, will probably, upon making the Experiment, be found really far less so than they at present seem, as many can testify from Experience: or should they be found as great as you imagine them, the Importance and Advantage of the Duty is an abundant Overbalance.

Having thus taken a View of several Things, on Account of which it may seem evil to some to serve the Lord, the other things proposed on this Subject must be referred to another Discourse.

S E R M O N II.

A

Perfuasive to PERSONAL and FAMILY
RELIGION.

J O S H U A, XXIV. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD,
choose you this Day whom you will serve, whe-
ther the gods which your Fathers served,
that were on the other Side of the Flood,
or the gods of the Amorites, in whose Land
ye dwell: But as for me and my House, we
will serve the LORD.*

IN the foregoing Discourse I have in-
quired, on what Accounts it may be
supposed to seem evil to any to serve
the Lord, and have endeavoured to obvi-
ate the Pretences, which many are ready
to make to excuse themselves from it. I
hope, I have at least convinced you how vain
and worthless they are: Oh that I had
Reason also to believe, that I had effectually
prevailed

prevailed upon every one of you, resolutely to break through every Obstacle, and to apply yourselves in the Strength of divine Grace, to serve God in Truth, both in your own Persons and in your Families. May at least what is now further to be offered, be rendered effectual for that Purpose, by the concurring Blessing of the holy Spirit. I proceed then,

II. To press you to make your Choice, whom or what ye will serve.

In Pursuit of this Design, let me entreat you to consider, the Objects betwixt which your Choice must lie ---- the Reasonableness of coming to some Determination ---- the Importance of doing it without Delay ---- and the Consequences that will attend the Choice you make.

1. Consider the Objects betwixt which your Choice must lie.

There was an immense Difference betwixt the Objects which *Joshua* proposed to the *Israelites*, as Competitors for their Service, the self-existent and eternal Jehovah on the one hand, who had by a Train of Miracles brought them out of the Bondage of Egypt, conducted them through the Wilderness, and put them in Possession of the Land he had promised them: and on the other hand, either the ancient Idols which

their Fathers had served, while destitute of any such Inheritance, or the modern ones of the *Amorites* whom they had dispossessed, that had manifestly appeared unable to deliver their deluded Votaries out of their Hand.

The like immense Difference there is betwixt the Objects on which *your* Choice must fix: the God that brought into Being, that upholds you in it, and daily loads you with his Benefits, on whom you depend every Moment, and before whom you must speedily appear, calls you on the one hand, to a Service the most reasonable, honourable, and advantageous imaginable: on the other hand, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil tempt you to a Slavery, most unworthy of immortal Minds, full of Shame, and leading to Destruction. Will you devote yourselves to the Service of the World? what a fleeting Bubble! what an empty Shadow! and how absurd must it be to give this the Preference to eternal Glory! Will you gratify the Flesh, or indulge it in Sloth or sensual Pleasure? Does not common Prudence teach you to do otherwise in the ordinary Affairs of Life, when any important Interests stand in competition with your Inclinations and Ease? Shall then this poor dying Flesh have more Regard paid to it than your Souls, that must survive through eternal Ages? How short are its Pleasures!

Pleasures ! how low ! how groveling ! on a Level with those of the Beasts that perish ! while in God's Service, Pleasures are to be found akin to those of Angels and equally durable. Will you serve Sin and Satan ? their Service is shameful and abominable, and their very *Wages*, *Death* * and Hell. Oh think of the amazing Difference betwixt God's Service and that of all other Lords, and choose accordingly.

The Objects also are widely different betwixt which your Choice must lie, with respect to serving God in your Families, whether you will obey God's Command, to *train up your Children in the Way in which they should go* †, or neglect one important, and I think I may venture to say, one essential Part of it ; whether you will approve yourselves, the faithful Friends of the Souls committed to your Care, or expose them to imminent Danger by your Neglect ; whether your Houses should be consecrated to God, or little or no Regard be paid to him there ; and whether your Families should be habituated to his Service, or remain Strangers to it.

2. Consider the Reasonableness of coming to some Determination.

The Objects that have been presented to you, are certainly such as demand your Attention : were it a trivial Matter that was

* Rom. vi. 23.

† Prov. xxii. 6.

proposed to you, you might safely refuse to bestow so much Thought upon it, as to come to any Determination about it; but no Question is equally interesting with this, Whether you and your Houses will serve the Lord? To continue in Suspense about it, differs but little from determining in the Negative; as you certainly will not serve God, either personally or in your Families, while you hesitate about it: Or should a Sense of the Reasonableness, and Importance of it, sometimes so far preponderate, as to put you upon some Efforts towards it; while it remains so weak as not absolutely to fix your Determination, it cannot be supposed to produce that Constancy and Ardour in his Service, which is necessary to answer the Ends of it. And let me intreat you to consider, whether the Difficulties you apprehend, are of sufficient Importance to be compared with the Favour of God, and the Worth of your own Souls and those of your Families; if not, certainly they ought not to keep you in Suspense about it. Perhaps Conscience will not suffer you to be at ease in the *Neglect* of Personal or Family-Religion, at least, I hope it will not in consequence of these Discourses; neither can it be at rest, as long as it retains its Sensibility, while you continue in *Suspense*. If then its Voice deserves any Regard, let it be heard and obeyed;

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ed; and if not, why should it disquiet you at all?

3. Consider the Importance of determining without Delay.

Permit me to address you upon this Head in the Words of the Text, *choose you this Day whom you will serve*. Perhaps while you hesitate, God may be so far displeased, with your Uncertainty and Delay, as to send some Judgment upon you to quicken your Resolves; should he blast your Substance, deprive you of your Health, or cut off some beloved Branch of your Families, could you help regarding it as a Token of his Wrath, for your not hearkening to the Counsel this Day given you from his Word? and would not such an Apprehension add double Weight to the Affliction? Perhaps your Life draws near to its Period, and great Things depend upon every Day and every Hour. If you are so far convinced of the Necessity of serving God, either in your own Persons or Families, as to determine to apply yourselves to it at some future Time, when you hope your present Difficulties will be removed, how uncertain is such a Purpose? Perhaps even now you stand upon the Borders of an eternal World, and before that imaginary future Time comes, you may be summoned thither to give an Account of your Negligence and Delay.

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It can scarce be imagined, that you will ever have a more advantageous Season for it than the present, while the Subject is warm upon your Minds, and while you are impressed with the Considerations now set before you, if indeed you are so: The Impression will die away by Degrees, if it produces no present Effect; you will find new Excuses for the Neglect of Personal, and Family-Religion, and probably remain totally negligent of both. With respect to the latter in particular, you have now a greater Advantage, for introducing it into your Families, than if you defer it a single Day; this Discourse, which your Families hear with you, offers you an Occasion for entering upon it; you will need no other Introduction to it, than to tell them, this very Evening, that you are convinced by what you have heard, that it is your Duty immediately to set up the Practice of Religion among them, and that though you have hitherto neglected it, you are determined by divine Assistance to do it no longer. I am persuaded they will expect it from you, and to some of them, I hope, it will be a painful Disappointment, if they find by the Event that the present Admonition is ineffectual.

4. Consider the Consequences that will attend your Choice according as it is made.

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If through the Grace of God, you are taught to *choose that better Part which shall not be taken from you* *, it will be a Choice gloriously advantageous. *Godliness has the Promise of the Life which now is and of that which is to come* †, every Blessing which infinite Wisdom sees needful or expedient for you, awaits you for the present Time: the rich Treasures of a Father's Grace, and the Blessings purchased by a Saviour's Blood shall be yours, among which you will have Reason to expect, the divine Entertainment of Peace of Conscience, Joy in the Holy Ghost, and the Foretastes of eternal Life: Death shall be disarmed of its Sting, the Gates of Heaven be opened to you, and an assured Entrance thither at last be given you. But if you determine that you will not serve the Lord, but persist in the Gratification of your own Lusts, what have you to expect for the present Life, but the Wrath and Curse of God, in proportion to the Light and Advantages you have abused? and how justly may divine Displeasure render you a Terrour to yourselves, and those around you! But if, on the contrary, undeserved Forbearance and Gentleness should attend you through all this mortal State, how terrible must the Consequence be in the World to come! there, the Wrath of God seizes his Enemies; devouring Fire, and un-

* Luke, x. 42.

† 1 Tim. iv. 8.

known Terrours are prepared for those that *will not that he should reign over them* †. Devils and damned Spirits are their Companions, and Eternity adds immense Weight, to all their Misery. *I call Heaven and Earth to record against you, that I have set before you Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing; therefore choose Life, that both you and your Seed may live* *: For the Choice you make for yourselves, is likely to have its important Influence on your Children too, as your Determination to serve God yourselves or not, will probably fix also your Determination with respect to serving him in your Families.

The Worship and Fear of God maintained in your Families, will have a happy Tendency to bring down a Blessing upon you, and will furnish a much more reasonable Ground to expect the Smiles of divine Providence, than you can have in the Neglect of it. You are not, indeed, to expect an Exemption from Afflictions, which are the common Lot of Mortality; but if you and your Houses serve the Lord, you will have a Support and Source of Consolation, under such Afflictions as divine Wisdom may allot you, which others want: It will be an important Means of rendering those Afflictions beneficial, and they will soon come to their eternal Period.

† Luke, xix. 14.

* Deut. xxx. 19.

Daily Diligence in the several Parts of your domestic Duty, will be one of the most probable Methods you can take, to form your Children to an amiable and becoming Temper and Conduct in Life ; to render them Blessings, to those with whom they may be hereafter connected ; and to engage them to imitate, in future Families of their own, what they have been accustomed to in yours ; by which Means most important Benefits may be successively transmitted to distant Generations. On the other Hand, should you unhappily determine, yet to suffer your Families to resemble the *Families of Heathens*, and to be brought up *without calling upon God*, what reason can you have to expect any thing else, but that *his Fury should be poured out upon them as such* * ? What reason to be surprized, if they should be as wicked as any about you, and give you the bitterest Distress ? Perhaps you will say, You have told them better ; but what Effect can be expected, from Admonitions and Expostulations not enforced by Example and the constant Practice of Religion among them ? And who can pretend to say, how far the Mischief may reach, or to how many future Ages it may extend ? I proceed now to the

* Jer. x. 25.

III^d. General Head, to explain the Import of the solemn Resolution here taken, *as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.*

I cannot but hope that many of you either long ago, or now at least, have formed the same Purpose; but that it may be the more effectual, let us consider the Nature of such a Resolution, with respect both to ourselves, and our Families. Let us attend to it,

1. With respect to ourselves.

It is evidently necessary first to resolve that we ourselves will serve the Lord, before we can with any Propriety, or Prospect of Success, determine that our Families shall do so; and this must imply a thorough Conviction of the Reasonableness, Obligation, and Advantage of the Service of God; a deliberate Choice of his blessed Majesty to be the Sovereign of our Souls, and a Surrender of ourselves to him as his Subjects and Servants. While those that are only enlightened and startled remain undetermined, satisfy themselves with a partial Performance of their Duty, and generally, soon draw back even from that; they that are sanctified, devote themselves to God with the most fixed and unreserved Purpose to be altogether his: The Excellence of his Service, and the rich Blessings of his Favour overbalance every other Consideration,
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and engage them to a diligent Obedience to all his Commandments, and a watchful Guard against every Thing offensive to him: Such must be the Disposition of our Minds, and such the Effect of it on our Conversation, if we determine indeed to serve the Lord: The Service of Sin must be absolutely renounced, and an irreconcilable Warfare commenced against it, in all its Kinds and Degrees: the Service of God must be made our Business and Delight, and the several Duties of it our daily Employment: Nor must this be only the Work of a few Weeks or Months, but the Business of Life itself, in which we determine, by divine Assistance, to persevere to the End; and if we cordially devote ourselves to the Lord, it will be a Pleasure to us to reflect, that we shall not only serve him for the few short Years of Mortality, but to Eternity itself. Let us further consider this Resolution,

2. As it relates to our Families.

If we desire to imitate the illustrious Example in the Text, we must not confine our Resolutions to ourselves, but include our Children and other Members of our Families with us, determining for them too, that as far as our Influence over them can prevail, they also shall serve the Lord. The blessed God has committed them to our Care, not only to provide for the Support
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of their animal Natures, but especially to watch for their Souls, and endeavour to lead them to a cordial Dedication of themselves to God. For this Purpose it is necessary to teach them the great Truths of the Word of God, such as their Relation to him as his Creatures, their Obligations to him, their Dependence upon him, his constant Observation of them, the Excellence of his Favour, and the Terrours of his Anger; the Reasonableness, Advantage, and Necessity of Holiness, and the detestable and pernicious Nature of Sin; their fallen State, their absolute Need of a Saviour, the Necessity of the Work of the Spirit of God on their Hearts, and the Certainty and Solemnity of a future Judgment and eternal World. We must labour to impress these and other Things which the Word of God reveals, in the deepest Manner upon their Minds, and solemnly warn them of the Danger of forgetting them, or living without due Regard to them. We are bound to teach them their Duty to the blessed God, to revere his holy Name, to study his Word, to sanctify his Sabbaths, to obey him as their great Sovereign, and to love and praise him as their gracious Benefactor. They must also be taught the great Duties of Justice and Truth, of Benevolence, Forbearance, and Forgiveness to their Fellow-Creatures, of Subjection to Superiours, and Kindness to
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Equals and Inferiours, together with the right Government of their Appetites and Passions. They must be often warned of the sad Consequences of a Disregard to any of these things, and every Appearance of it be checked with the utmost Care. The *Israelites* were commanded, *Deut. vi. 7.* Diligently to *teach their Children* the great things of the Law of God, *and to talk of them when they sat in their Houses, and when they walked by the Way, when they lay down, and when they rose up;* thus improving every Opportunity for this Purpose; and certainly the Obligation upon Christians cannot be in any Degree less, but in Reality greater.

The Authority with which God has invested the Heads of Families, must be also used, to restrain their Children and other Domestics from Sin, and to keep them constant in the Practice of their Duty; 'tis a Talent put into our Hands for that Purpose, which is by no Means to be given up, but to be employed for the most important Ends, as we must give an Account of this, as well as all our other Talents before God.

The reading of the Word of God, and daily earnest Prayer to him with our Families, is another great Branch of Family-Religion, which indeed, I have principally in View at present, and without which we

can by no means justly expect, either to be approved of God, or to succeed in any other of our Endeavours for their spiritual Advantage ; and those who will not be prevailed upon to enter upon this, whatever they determine with respect to themselves, do in Effect resolve, so far as their Families are concerned, they will not serve the Lord.

And now, my Friends, which will you choose ? Will you serve God in your own Persons, and in your Families, and conscientiously use all the means in your Power, to lead them to serve him too, or not ? What Examples are most worthy of your Imitation, those on the one hand, that stand upon the most honourable Record in the Word of God ; such as that of *Abraham* that was honoured with a divine Attestation, *Gen. xviii. 19. For I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Household after him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham, that which he hath spoken of him ;* such as that of *Daniel*, *Dan. vi. 10.* who neither abated, nor sought to conceal his usual Course of Devotion, notwithstanding the profane Decree, that threatened him with the Lion's Den for it, from which that glorious Majesty whom he served, brought him forth in perfect Safety, and with the utmost Honour ; such as that also of the illustrious Leader of *Israel* in the Text ? or
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on the other hand, the Multitudes around you that live without God in the World, and bring up their unhappy Posterity in Ignorance of him, and Estrangement from him? Remember, I beseech you, that the Eyes of God and Angels are from this Hour especially upon you; and I am persuaded the Eyes of your Children and Servants, will be upon you too, to observe what Effect the Pamphlets just distributed among you, and the present Discourse have upon you; and will you consent that both Heaven and Earth should be Witnesses, that you are incapable of being persuaded, to a Service so highly reasonable and advantageous?

I cannot but most earnestly wish, that none among you might be so insensible of the important Considerations that have been set before you, or be infatuated to so great a Degree, as still to neglect the Service of God, either personally, or in your Families. But whatever Choice *you* make, *I* would say with *Joshua*, in Dependence on the Assistance of the Grace of God, *As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord*; and I intreat you all, if you should see us acting in a manner unworthy of so solemn a Purpose, that you would plainly and faithfully remind us, that *the Vows of God are upon us**, and that *we have lifted up our Hand to the Lord*†,

* Psal. lvi. 12.

† Gen. xiv. 22.

and cannot draw back without the greatest Guilt and Danger. And if after my Decease, any that belong to me, should at all depart from God, I intreat those of you that may survive me, to admonish them in the strongest and most pathetic manner; to put them in mind of their Dedication to God, of the Endeavours that have been used to lead them to his Service, and of the solemn Engagement that has been this Day in particular made in their Behalf; and to do every thing possible to reduce them to God and their Duty. It now only remains,

IV. That I conclude with several Exhortations relative to the Subject, especially to the Religion of Families :

Such as these ; Watch against every thing that would hinder or dishonour it --- content not yourselves with a partial Performance of it --- labour to be lively and spiritual in it --- let those that are in Families where it is neglected, seriously consider what their Duty requires of them --- let the Domesticks of those who maintain, or attempt to commence the Worship of God in their Families, dread the Thought of giving the least Obstruction to it ---- and let young Persons that desire to serve God, take heed of joining themselves to such as will not concur with them in it.



I. Watch

1. Watch against every thing that would hinder, or dishonour the Duties of Family-Religion.

The due Government of your own Passions, is a Matter of great Importance to that Purpose: Harsh Words and unkind Actions will grieve the Spirit of God, and unfit both yourselves for a becoming Performance of Family-Worship, and your Families for a profitable Attendance upon it; the Apostle, therefore, charges *Husbands to dwell with their Wives according to Knowledge, giving Honour to the Wife as the weaker Vessel, and as being Heirs of the Grace of Life*, by this very Consideration, *that your Prayers be not hindered**. Take care, therefore, always to maintain a peaceful, tender, and affectionate Disposition to your Relatives, and a kind and obliging Behaviour to your Servants, that they may have nothing to prejudice them against your Acts of Family-Worship, or prevent their getting good by them. Unseasonable Hours will be also a great Hindrance to the profitable Performance of the Duty, and probably occasion frequent Neglects of it, exclude a Part of your Families from it, and render those that attend it incapable of doing it to Advantage. Let such Hours therefore be observed, as far as is consistent with other Duties, when no un-

* 1 Pet. iii. 7.

avoidable Hinderance intervenes, at which your whole Families may attend, and with as great Advantage as possible. Especially take heed that you never transgress the Bounds of Temperance, which would bring both you and your pretended Devotions into Contempt, and probably soon lead you to a total Neglect of them. And in every other Respect, watch against every thing that might give those about you Reason to conclude, that you had not Religion really at heart; as such a Conduct would be a flagrant Contradiction to your Acts of Worship, and render that Worship itself, but the means of greater Dishonour to God and Religion, and of hardening their Hearts the more.

2. Content not yourselves with a partial Performance of Family-Worship.

There's too much Reason to fear that there is great need of this Exhortation, and that many Heads of Families, who cannot satisfy themselves, to live in a total Neglect of calling upon God in their Families, yet content themselves with the frequent Neglect of reading his Word there, and with praying but once a Day. It must indeed be acknowledged, that this is greatly preferable to a total Neglect of it; yet whatever favourable Sentiments there may be room to entertain of such Persons on other Accounts, I cannot help fearing that they are, generally, greatly defective in Zeal, and Fervency in
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God's Service. The Morning and Evening afford a kind of natural Call, to offer our humble Duty to our Preserver, both in secret and in our Families; in the Morning, thankfully to acknowledge our own and their Preservation in the defenceless Hours of Sleep, and to entreat the needful Mercies of the Day; and in the Evening, to return our grateful Praise for the Mercies we have received, to confess and humble ourselves for the Sins of the Day, and implore the Protection and Rest of the Night. The Evening and the Morning Sacrifices, among the Jews, seem also to point out the same Seasons to us, for drawing near to God; and the *Psalmist* particularly takes notice of the Fitness and Advantage of doing it, at both these Times, *Psal. xcii. 1, 2. It is a good Thing to give Thanks unto the Lord, and to sing Praises unto thy Name, O most High: To shew forth thy Loving-kindness in the Morning, and thy Faithfulness every Night:* The Scriptures even furnish us with Examples of praying three Times a Day in *Daniel*, and *David*, who says, *Psal. lv. 17. Evening and Morning, and at Noon will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my Voice.* With these Examples before us of abounding in Prayer, which from the Circumstances or Manner of Expression, seem to have been social Prayer, can it be becoming to confine

our Addressees to God to one of these Seasons?

Where this unworthy Custom prevails, I presume it is generally the Evening that is allotted for Worship: But if there is then need to commit ourselves to the Protection of divine Providence, amidst the Darkness and Insensibility of the Night, there is surely equal Reason to offer our Acknowledgments for it *in the Morning*, and still greater need, to commit ourselves to the Care of the Grace of God, to preserve us from the Snares and Temptations of the Day; since the Danger to which our *Souls* are exposed by these, is far more important than that to which our *Bodies* are liable in the Night: And the Scriptures seem to lay even a greater Stress upon the Worship of the Morning, than that of the Evening: Thus the Psalmist says, *Psal. v. 3. My Voice shalt thou hear in the Morning, O Lord; in the Morning will I direct my Prayer unto thee, and will look up: and Psal. lix. 16. But I will sing of thy Power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy Mercy in the Morning: and Psal. lxxxviii. 13. In the Morning shall my Prayer prevent thee.*

3. Earnestly seek to be lively and spiritual in the Worship of God in your Families.

In vain do they worship, either in secret or with others, who are regardless of the Temper of their Minds therein. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him*

*him in Spirit and in Truth**: Nor can any other Kind of Worship be either acceptable to him, or advantageous to ourselves. But real Devotion is particularly important, in that Part of Worship, which I am now recommending, as the Advantage will probably not be confined to ourselves; and the Loss and Injury, arising from a careless and formal Performance of the Duty, be more than personal. How desirable is it to have the Seasons of our own Intercourse with God and Heaven doubled, by the Worship, both of the Closet and of the Family! But how peculiarly animating an Engagement does it afford, to seek the utmost Spirituality in our Family-Worship, to reflect upon the Probability of our becoming by that means, Instruments of much spiritual Benefit to our Families, either for beginning or quickening the divine Life in their Souls! How delightful the Thought, of their blessing God through the future Parts of Life, and adoring him to Eternity for their Connection with us, and Advantage received by our Family-Worship! On the other Hand, if we unhappily satisfy ourselves with a bare Performance, without any Approaches of our Souls to God, or holy Fervour of Devotion in it, our Domestics, as well as ourselves, can scarce taste any Pleasure in it, or gain any Advantage by it; but will rather

* John iv. 29.

rather grow weary of it, and perhaps contract a Disrelish and Contempt for the Duty itself, which may never be removed.

4. Let those that are placed in Families, where the Worship of God is neglected, seriously consider what God expects from them in such a Situation.

Perhaps the Heads of the Families where you reside, are not averse to it, nor utterly unconcerned about it: Perhaps a timorous Disposition, rather than an utter Disregard of their Duty, prevents their Practice of it among their Domestics; and a prudent and becoming Representation of its Usefulness and Importance, and Intimation of the Pleasure it would give you to have it maintained, might open the Way for it. In some Cases an inferiour Member of a Family, with the Consent of the Head of it, might without any Infringement on the Honour due to a Superiour, take his Place in this respect, greatly to the Advantage of the Family. A Mother where a Father is wanting, or negligent of his Duty, may, and I think, certainly ought, to supply that Defect not only in instructing, and admonishing her Children, but in praying with them, at least while they are young; and it might have a happy Effect to form them to such a Sense of Religion, that they might in their riper Years take the Duty upon themselves: Even Servants that truly fear God, might at least
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in private, so far supply the Want of a Parent's Duty, as to become real and important Blessings to the younger Branches of the Families, in which they are placed, and in consequence of it, secure their lasting Esteem and Affection to themselves. Let then the subordinate Members of such Families, the Masters of which neglect their Duty, seriously consider how they can best approve themselves to God, and become Blessings to those about them, and earnestly entreat the Wisdom of God to direct them. But if nothing can be done for such unhappy Families, let those that are situated in them, at least be solicitous so much the more seriously to attend to their secret Duties, and to keep up *Fellowship with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ* *, in them, to supply to their own Souls, the Want of the Benefit of Family-Religion.

5. Let the Domestics of those who maintain, or attempt to set up the Worship of God in their Families, dread the Thought of giving the least Obstruction to it.

Your Indifference or Coldness towards it, your Reluctance to attend it, and much more an Opposition to it, or Signs of Contempt of it, may perhaps so far discourage the Masters of the Families in which you live, as either to hinder the Duty itself, or at least to render it more difficult. But what an

* 1 John i. 3.

Account must those have to give, before the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who shall stand convicted at his Tribunal, of having thrown Impediments in the Way of his Service, in a Part of it which might have been so highly beneficial to themselves and others, and of thus being Curses instead of Blessings to the Families, to which they have belonged! If Imperfections should be discovered in the Performance of the Duty, is it not far better to be maintained even with such Imperfections, than be totally neglected? Ask yourselves what Judgment God will pass, and in what Manner he will regard your Conduct, if you presume to discourage those, that desire to offer him this reasonable Service in their Families. Will he admit your Plea of the Weakness of the Performance, as a sufficient Apology for your Opposition to it? Take heed of preparing for yourselves, so sad an Account at his Tribunal, as you must, if instead of promoting his Service, you are found to obstruct it.

6. Let young Persons that desire to serve God, take heed of joining themselves with those that will not concur with them in it.

The divine Command, 2 Cor. vi. 14. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with Unbelievers,* does not seem to be peculiar, to an Age when Christians were surrounded with Strangers and Enemies to Christianity; but by a Pa-
rity

rity of Reason extends to succeeding Ages, and forbids the Marriage of Persons that fear God, with those who give no Reason to believe that they do so too; which seems plainly supported by the Apostle's manner of Expression, 1 Cor. vii. 39. *She is at Liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord:* And the Importance of these divine Commands in this extensive View, appears from observing, that the Ruin of the old World is ascribed to the mixed Marriages of Saints and Sinners, Gen. vii. 2. *The Sons of God saw the Daughters of Men, that they were fair; and took them Wives of all which they chose:* in consequence of which, a general Corruption of Mankind succeeded, and then the Deluge which swept them all away: and there's great Reason to expect the like Corruption, in the Descendants of Persons so unhappily united, especially if the pious Parent should die first, and leave a young Offspring to the Care of a Parent destitute of Religion.

But besides the other unhappy Consequences of such Marriages, that is none of the least, to which this Subject leads our Thoughts; as they can scarce fail of being attended, with great Hinderances to the Exercises of Personal, and especially of Family-Religion. The bare Want of Quickening, Encouragement, and Concurrence may itself be justly reckoned, a great Obstacle to both: But there is reason also to fear, in such mixed Families,

Families, that with respect at least to the latter, Excuses will be formed for the Neglect of it, Difficulties thrown in the Way, and perhaps an absolute Contempt of it, and Aversion to it, shewn to a Degree which nothing but the most determined Resolution, with uncommon Assistance from above, can surmount: and surely, it is highly important, for those that desire to avoid such Clogs in the Way of their Duty, to guard against that which may be justly expected to produce them, and seek to join themselves only with such, who they may reasonably hope will be, in this most important respect, Helps meet for them, and Inheritors with them of the Kingdom of Glory.

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

DIRECTIONS and MOTIVE to returns
to GOD.

J E R E M I A H, L. 5.

*They shall ask the Way to Zion with their Faces
thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join
ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual Covenant,
that shall not be forgotten.*

HAVING last Lord's Day been earnestly
preffing the great Duties of Personal
and Family-Religion, I hope not without
some Impressions on the Minds of some a-
mong us; I am solicitous, if possible, to ren-
der them more deep and effectual, to prevent
their being obliterated by the Artifices of
Satan, or to revive them where they already
are so, and to guard such Hearts against
*being hardened afresh, through the Deceitful-
ness of Sin* *. I have therefore chosen these
Words, for the Subject of our present Me-

* Heb. ii. 13.

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ditions, as highly proper to follow those which we were so lately considering. They are part of a Prophecy, of the happy Temper, with which the Jews after their Captivity in *Babylon*, should return to their own Land, and to their forsaken God. But they are also applicable with great Propriety to the Case of Sinners, *returning* from a State of Guilt and Misery, *to the Shepherd and Bishop of Souls*. I shall, therefore, offer by divine Assistance, which I earnestly implore,

I. Some Directions, which arise from these Words, considered in this View, to return to God.

II. Some important Considerations to engage you to it. I am,

I. To offer some Directions to return to God.

And they are such as these, to which I entreat those that have hitherto lived estranged from God, diligently to attend and apply themselves. Seriously inquire after the Way to return to him ---- do it as those that are in earnest concerned to pursue it ---- solemnly give up your Souls to God ---- and do it in a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten. While I thus endeavour to direct, and afterwards to persuade you to that which

is of infinite Importance to your eternal Happiness, I earnestly pray that almighty Grace itself, may effectually teach and engage you to devote yourselves truly to God, and make you Partakers of all the unutterable Blessings, of a Covenant Relation to him.

1. Let those who have hitherto continued afar from God, seriously inquire the Way to return to him.

Thus it was foretold in the Text, that the returning Jewish Captives *should ask the Way to Zion*. 'Tis the inexpressible Folly of those, *that are going on still in their Trespases**, that they will not inquire after the Way of Salvation, nor how they shall return to God. On the contrary, *they say unto God*, by their constant Temper and Behaviour, according to the Account given of such kind of Persons, *Job xxi. 14. Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of thy Ways*. Sinners, in their natural State, are so far from having any Disposition to walk in the Ways of God, that they concern not themselves so much as to know them. And must not the Consciences of many of you, if their Voice might be heard, testify against you, that this has been hitherto your Case, and that you have not sought to know God, and the things that relate to your eternal Peace?

* Psal. lxxviii. 21.

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On the contrary, we have several Instances in Scripture, of the solemn Inquiry which Souls returning to God have made, after the Way of their Duty and Salvation. Thus when three Thousand were converted in one Day, *Acts ii. 37. They said unto Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, Men and Brethren, what shall we do?* When Saul was struck down to the Earth with Surprise and Terror at his Conversion, we are told, *Acts ix. 6. that he trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* And the Jailor, in like manner, when alarmed by the Earthquake, *Acts xvi. 29, 30. called for a Light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* Such is the genuine Disposition of a Soul returning to God, and such the Inquiry it will make.

If any of you are folicitous to come to God, and have been forming, with respect to yourselves and your Families, in consequence of what you have lately heard, *Joshua's Resolution, As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord; go and inquire the Way to Zion,* or the Way of your Duty, and Escape from divine Wrath. And there are several Methods, by which you may and ought to inquire. In particular, study the Scriptures, those lively Oracles of God; this is our Lord's own Direction, *John v. 39. Search the Scriptures,*

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tures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me: Take notice of what you are there taught, concerning your Duty, and the Way by which you must be saved. Observe the Directions there given, to repent of Sin, to forsake the Company of Sinners, to come to Christ, and to believe in his all-sufficient Righteousness and Grace: Treasure up its divine Instructions in your Hearts, meditate upon them, and seek to be obedient to them: Inquire by reading the most spiritual Writings, and hearing the most serious and evangelical Ministers you can; you will find in the former, and under the Ministrations of the latter, a Variety of Instructions and Counsels taken from the Word of God, highly adapted to teach humble Inquirers, the Way of their Duty and Happiness.

To inquire in private Conversation, both of Ministers and others of God's Servants, whom you have Reason to believe best qualified and disposed to teach you the Way of the Lord, would be also a probable Means of obtaining much spiritual Light and Advantage. In the common Affairs of Life, 'tis a great Hinderance to obtaining Knowledge, and the Way to continue in Ignorance, when Persons are so far ashamed to let it be known, as to neglect to inquire. And the Effect of it must be the same in the great Affairs of Religion, but much

more dangerous. Go then to those that are able, and will rejoice to direct you, with such Inquiries as these; “How may such
 “a Rebel against God, as I have been, escape
 “from the Wrath to come? How may I
 “get free from the Snares of the Devil,
 “in which I have been hitherto held? How
 “may I conquer those Sins which have
 “hitherto had Dominion over me? How
 “shall I learn to live a Life of Religion,
 “and surmount the Difficulties I have to
 “encounter? By what Methods have you
 “been enabled so far to conquer, and to
 “maintain a Course of Obedience to God
 “as you do?” The Servants of God, if they have Reason to believe you sincere in your Inquiries, will with great Pleasure tell you, what they have learnt from the Word of Truth, and from their own and others Experience, to guide, encourage, and assist you in the Way to the heavenly Zion: And if in some of your greatest Difficulties, you could be particular in opening your Case to them, they might offer those things which might be of the highest Use to you. And humbly entreat the blessed God, when you are about to converse with his Servants on these important Heads, to direct them to speak a Word in Season to you, that may answer the most blessed Ends to your Souls. Especially inquire of God himself, by earnest solemn Prayer, humbly imploring the Influences

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fluences of his blessed Spirit, to guide you into his holy Ways: Cry to him, *Teach me to do thy Will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the Land of Uprightness* §: *Shew me thy Ways, O Lord; teach me thy Paths* †. *I am a Stranger in the Earth, hide not thy Commandments from me* ‡. *What I know not, teach thou me* *, and instruct a poor ignorant unexperienced Creature, in the Way of Duty and eternal Salvation.

2. Let me intreat you to make this Inquiry, as those that are in earnest concerned to pursue the Way you ask.

Thus it is said in the Text, *They shall ask the Way to Zion with their Faces thitherward*, that is, as Persons that are really travelling thither, desirous to know the Way, in order to walk in it; not in Mockery, or for mere Amusement and Curiosity, as we should think they did, who asked the Way to a Place, and when told immediately turned and went another Road.

'Tis to little or no Purpose, for you to inquire after the Ways of God, without a serious Purpose and Concern to walk in them, and while you yet continue to walk in the Ways of Sin: you will but grieve the People of God, and insult his blessed Majesty himself, if you ask the Way to Hea-

§ Psal. cxliii. 10. † Psal. xxv. 4. ‡ Psal. cxix. 19.
* Job xxxiv. 32.

ven, and set your Faces in the Way to Hell: if you will still join yourselves with Sinners, and make them your chosen Friends and Companions; if you will waste your Time, and injure your Souls, by Drinking, Gaming, Idleness, foolish, or wicked Discourse, 'twill be in vain for you to inquire the Way to *Zion*, if you should make any Pretences to it, which is scarce to be supposed, because you do it not *with your Faces thitherward*. If you continue to neglect those Things, which the Word and Servants of God teach you, and of the Necessity of which his Spirit warns you by its secret Admonitions; if when you have been entreated to study the Word of God, you will still disregard it, or when you have been pressed to the great Duty of Prayer, you will still live without it; if you will not think of God, or will still persist in the Neglect of any other known Duty, or the Practice of any wilful Sin; let your own Consciences judge, whether you are inquiring the Way to *Zion*, with your Faces thitherward. If you only entertain some good Purposes for Futurity, and are not solicitous to put them into present Execution, you will inquire to little or no Purpose; and Satan will undoubtedly find a Way, while you delay, to hinder the Fulfilment of your Purposes, and perhaps to destroy those very Purposes themselves, unless some wonderful Interposition
of

of divine Mercy prevents, which you have not the least Reason to expect, while you thus tempt God, and grieve his holy Spirit.

If you are in earnest determined to serve the Lord, forsake your sinful Company; flee from Temptation; shun the Occasions of Sin; avoid the Places of Danger; and enter without delay upon the Practice of neglected Duties; immediately begin the great Work of mortifying Sin, and of crying earnestly to God in secret and in your Families, for Grace to enable you and yours to serve him faithfully, to conquer Corruption, to triumph over Temptation, to surmount every Difficulty, and to press towards his heavenly Kingdom.

3. Solemnly give up yourselves to God.

'Tis the Misery of Sinners, that they are by Nature and Practice alienated from God; and it will be, without recovering Grace, their everlasting Ruin, that they shall be to Eternity separated from him. As they now say unto God, *Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of thy Ways*; so his Justice will shortly confirm their Choice by that dreadful Sentence, *Depart from me, ye Cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels* *. Nothing, therefore, less than a saving Union of your Souls to the ever blessed God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, can preserve you from so tremendous

* Matth. xxv. 41.

a Doom, or stand you in any important Stead. If you are at any Time awakened under the Word, or alarmed by the Providence of God, and in consequence of it in Part reform your vicious Courses, and begin to practise some external Duties of Religion; 'tis so far well, but utterly insufficient. If you are only concerned to escape from such Pollutions of the World, as injure your Characters, your Health, your Reputation, your Peace, and the Welfare of your Families, and make the greatest Ravages on your Consciences, but are not solicitous to join yourselves to the Lord, and make an entire Surrender of your Souls to him, to be renewed, and sanctified, and governed by him, as well as pardoned, justified, and saved from the Wrath to come, you are but like *Agrippa, Almost persuaded to be Christians* †. The Jewish Captives in the Text, proposed a nobler End, *to join themselves to the Lord*; and such is the Choice, and the fixed Determination of all that are truly returning from Sin to God. Your Aims are too low to be of any important Advantage to you, if you rest in any thing inferiour to this.

Let me then earnestly entreat you to take the blessed God for your God, chuse him as your Portion, and only Happiness, and let nothing be suffered to stand in Competition with the eternal Blessings of his Love. *Re-*

† Acts xxvi. 28.

ceive Christ Jesus the Lord* as your only Saviour, and the Sovereign of your Souls; and the blessed Spirit as your Sanctifier, your Guide, and Preserver, determining truly and constantly to obey his Dictates, and under a deep Sense of your Weakness and Sinfulness, earnestly entreating his gracious Assistance, to enable you to be steadfast. Which leads me to add,

4. Join yourselves thus to the Lord, in a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten.

Such a Surrender of yourselves to God, as has been recommended, needs to be confirmed by the strongest Engagements. The Inconstancy of the Minds of fallen Creatures towards the blessed God and his Service, is so great, that it requires every thing possible to fix it; and the more frequently we enter into, and renew from Time to Time our Covenant with him, so much the more strongly will it tend to impress our Minds with a continued Sense of our Obligations to be the Lord's. This, some pious Writers have recommended to be done also in Writing, and have given us some solemn Forms for that purpose; and perhaps the Method is favoured by, *Isaiah* xliv. 5. *One shall say, I am the Lord's: And another shall call himself by the Name of Jacob: And another shall subscribe with his Hand to the*

* Col. ii. 6.

Lord,

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Lord, and surname himself by the Name of Israel.
At least I am persuaded that some that have used it, have found it to be attended with considerable Advantage.

But it is of the utmost Importance to remember, that our Covenant with God, must be a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten. It cannot be sincere, if it is not made with a steadfast Purpose, and earnest Concern that it may be so; that whatever it costs us, we may never forsake the Lord; but that the blessed Engagement may remain in full Force for Time and Eternity. And the same Determination, with which we enter into Covenant with God at first, must run through our whole Lives, and produce constant and diligent Endeavours, that it may be faithfully fulfilled, in all the Variety of Circumstances through which we pass. The persevering Christian is the only true Christian; and those that forsake the Lord, are unworthy of the Name of his Servants, and will for ever lose the Blessings, they once seemed to be pursuing. The Lord Jesus assures us, *Matth. xxiv. 13. He that shall endure to the End, the same shall be saved.* And on the other hand, he pronounces, *Luke, ix. 62. No Man having put his Hand to the Plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.* And to the same Purpose the Apostle teaches us, *Heb. x. 38. Now the Just shall live by Faith: But*
if

if any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him.

Having thus offered some Directions, which arise from these Words, to return to God, I proceed,

II. To offer some important Considerations, to engage you thus to return, and give up yourselves to him.

And, amidst many others that might be offered, such as these present themselves, as greatly adapted to awaken the Consciences of those among you, who are yet a far from God, and to persuade you to return to him. You are by Nature and Practice alienated from God ---- your Alienation from him is most dangerous and destructive ---- a Way is prepared for your Return ---- the glorious and blessed God is willing to receive you into Covenant with himself ---- and a Covenant Relation to him will be productive of supreme and everlasting Blessings.

I. You are by Nature and Practice alienated from God.

Such is the Account which the Word of God, that Oracle of eternal Truth, and that lively portrait of the Heart of Man, gives us of the State of unconverted Sinners, which will stand good, while all the contrary flattering Views that have ever been given, will vanish like a Dream. Both the
Old

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Old and New Testament concur in the same Account. Thus it is not only said of Man before the Flood, *Gen. vi. 5. That every Imagination of the Thought of his Heart was only evil continually*; but the Observation is repeated immediately after that desolating Judgment, by him that perfectly knew the human Heart, *Gen. viii. 21. The Imagination of the Heart of Man is evil from his Youth*: plainly representing Mankind as, upon the whole, the same corrupt and degenerate Creatures, amidst all the Variety of divine Dispensations towards them, though that Corruption and Degeneracy might shew itself in a greater Degree, at sometimes than at others. *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one* *, says *Job*, in the midst of a Discourse on the sorrowful and mortal State of Man; plainly imputing both to the polluted and sinful State of human Nature. *Behold*, says the *Psalmist* concerning himself, *Psal. li. 5. I was shapen in Iniquity, and in Sin did my Mother conceive me*: Nor is there the least Reason to believe that what he says, was in any Degree peculiar to himself, but equally applicable to the Case of all Mankind, as he speaks of himself on another Occasion, as *the Son of God's Handmaid* †. On this Foundation our Lord builds his important Doctrine of the Necessity of being born again, *John, iii. 6. That*

* *Job xiv. 4.*

† *Psal. cxvi. 16.*

which

which is born of the Flesh is Flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. In like manner the Apostle says, Col. i. 21. And you that were sometimes alienated and Enemies in your Minds by wicked Works, yet now hath he reconciled; And Eph. iv. 18. Having the Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that is in them, because of the Blindness of their Heart: And lest such things as these should be thought to be peculiar to the heathenish State of the Gentiles, he observes, Rom. iii. 9. What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under Sin; which he confirms by a large Quotation from the Psalms, As it is written, There is none Righteous, no not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the Way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one. And to the same Purpose he says, Gal. iii. 22. But the Scripture hath concluded all under Sin, that the Promise by Faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Look into your own Hearts and Lives, my Friends, and see if you cannot there discover, a sad Confirmation of these Accounts, which the Word of God has given of the State of fallen Man, and deplorable Evidence of your Alienation from God.

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Have not many of you lived without Prayer, and not acknowledged your Creator, your Preserver, and Benefactor, nor kept up his Worship, either in your Families, or in secret? And is not this a convincing Proof of your Estrangement from him? Ask yourselves, Could a Soul that has indeed joined itself to the Lord, have lived thus without any Notice of him, or Converse with him? Have you not confined your Regards to seen things, and contented yourselves with earthly Vanities, without any ardent Desire after an Interest in the Love of God, and the Enjoyment of his gracious Smiles? And does there need any further Evidence of your Alienation from him? Yet further, Have you not chosen those things which were utterly inconsistent with Union and Communion with him? Have you not loved Sin which he hates, and been rushing on from Time to Time in its accursed Ways? Behold, and start at the sad Evidences of your Estrangement from God; especially as it is further to be added,

2. Your Alienation from God is most dangerous and destructive.

Can there be a more awful Mark of Ruin, than the Estrangement of a reasonable Creature from his glorious Creator? When we see a stubborn rebellious Child foolishly desert his Parents, run away from their Habitation, and abandon his Duty to them, who of

us would hesitate to pronounce, that he was taking the Way to his own Ruin? Such is the Case of Sinners; they are running from God the Father of their Spirits, the Author of all their present Mercies, and the only Fountain of future and eternal Happiness, slighting his Favour, and venturing on the Terrours of his Wrath. Reflect, I beseech you, what must be the Consequence, if this is your own Case; and observe how positively the Scriptures assure you, that *the End of these Things is Death* *. Many ruin themselves for the present World by Sin, and it is evident to all around them, in what Misery and Shame they involve themselves. How many others give such Wounds to their Consciences, as throb with the keenest Anguish, perhaps to the latest Day of Life! while others contract such a degree of Hardness of Heart, that scarce even the worst Crimes make any Impression upon them, which is a Case still much more terrible.

Let me entreat those of you that are going on in your Sins, to consider, whether the one or the other of these is not your own Case. Have not some of you lost the Esteem and Friendship of your Fellow-Creatures, exposed yourselves to Shame, reduced yourselves to Straits and Difficulties, and destroyed your relative Peace and Comfort by Sin? Has not Conscience sometimes thunder-

* Rom. vii. 21.

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ed terribly in your Ears? Have you not been shocked at the View of your own Guilt, and trembled at the Thought of the dreadful Issue of it. Perhaps, with others of you, 'tis now quite different, and you can commit those Sins freely and without Regret, which would once have given you the utmost Uneasiness. If any of these things are your Case, they are surely sufficient to shew, in a strong Light, the dangerous and destructive nature of your Alienation from God, and Rebellion against him. Yet without a Return to God, these things are not the worst Consequences of it; for Death comes, *and after Death, Judgment* §; the Vengeance of an offended God, remains yet to be poured out with unspeakable Terrour, and Eternity must teach obstinate and impenitent Sinners, *how evil and how bitter a thing it is, that they have forsaken the Lord their God, and that his Fear has not been in them* ||.

3. There is a Way prepared for your Return to God.

Dangerous and dreadful as your Case is, by your Estrangement from God, there is yet a great and effectual Door of Hope open for every one among you, that is sincerely willing and concerned to return to him. 'Tis the Glory of the Gospel, that it proclaims, *That God is in Christ reconciling the*

§ Heb. ix. 27.

|| Jer. ii. 19.

World

World to himself, not imputing to them their Trespases†. He has sent his Son from Heaven, to put on human Flesh, in a Form of the deepest Abasement, to become an Infant, born in a Stable, wrapt in swadling Clothes, and laid in a Manger, to be a *Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*‡, and at last to expire in Agony and Blood; that through him poor guilty Creatures, thus alienated from God, might be brought near to him. And the gracious End has been happily answered to Multitudes, that were once miserable and perishing, in a State of Distance from him: Thus the Apostle testifies that it was with the believing *Ephesians*, *Eph. ii. 13.* *But now in Christ Jesus, ye who were sometimes far off, are brought nigh by the Blood of Christ.* And all that have truly believed in the Lord Jesus, through the several Ages of the Church, have experienced the like glorious Effect, and will spend Eternity in celebrating the Honours of that gracious Saviour, through whom they are brought near.

Howsoever great, therefore, your Estrangement from God has hitherto been, and however dreadful your Case, on that Account, you may yet approach him with Acceptance. His incarnate Son proclaims himself as *the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no Man cometh unto the Father but by him* §; and none that

† 2 Cor. v. 19. ‡ Isa. liii. 3. § John xiv. 6.

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comes in Truth through him, ever was, or ever will be rejected. His Blood was shed to expiate your Guilt; his Righteousness is sufficient to justify, and render you accepted before a God of spotless Purity; and his Grace is sufficient to bear you through all the Opposition of Satan, of Sinners, and of your own Corruptions.

4. The glorious and blessed God is willing to receive you into Covenant with himself.

He sits upon a Throne of Grace, stretches forth the Sceptre of his Mercy, and invites you and every poor perishing Sinner, that is willing, to come and accept the Blessings of his Love. Behold the abundant Evidence of it, which his Word affords: *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting Life* †. And so wonderful a Gift is an everlasting Testimony, of his gracious Readiness to receive, even the most unworthy and guilty, that come to God through him: Such a Way to his Throne would, certainly, never have been opened for lost Sinners, if he had not been most graciously ready to accept their Return. He has given the fullest Assurance of it, in the Promises and Invitations of his Word. *Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon*

† John iii. 16.

him,

him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon †. Him that cometh unto me, says his incarnate Word, I will in no wise cast out §. If any Man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink ||. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come: And whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely*. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean Thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my Sons and Daughters, saith the Lord Almighty †. Can Language be more gracious, Invitations more tender, or Promises more ample? And all this is confirmed, by wonderful Examples of pardoning and saving Mercy; in *Manasseh*, *Mary Magdalen*, the Murderers of our Lord, the *Jailor*, and *Saul the Persecutor*; the latter of which assures us, *1 Tim. i. 16.* For this Cause I obtained Mercy, that in me first, *Jesus Christ* might shew forth all long-suffering, for a Pattern to them, which should hereafter believe on him to Life everlasting.

Nor is it only to Blessings of a common or uncertain nature, that the blessed God is willing to receive you, but to all the rich Grace of his faithful and unchanging Covenant; as the Prophet *Jeremiah*, and from

† Isa. lv. 7.

• Rev. xxii. 17.

§ John vi. 37.

† 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

|| John vii. 37.

him, the Apostle assures us at large, *Heb. viii. 9---12. and Chap. x. 16, 17. This is the Covenant that I will make with them after those Days, saith the Lord; I will put my Laws into their Hearts, and in their Minds will I write them: And their Sins and Iniquities will I remember no more.* And he says by the Prophet *Isaiah, Isa. lv. 3. Incline your Ear and come unto me: Hear, and your Soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure Mercies of David.* Jesus is appointed the Mediator of this Covenant, and it is confirmed, by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, his Promise, and his Oath, that they might have strong Consolation, who have fled for Refuge, to lay hold on the Hope set before them. Once more,

5. A Covenant Relation to the blessed God, will be productive of supreme and everlasting Blessings.

His Covenant abounds with Promises, the most precious imaginable; such as of the Pardon of Sin, of an Interest in his Love, of the Answer of our Prayers, Grace to persevere to the End, Victory over Death, Acquittance and Applause at his great Tribunal, and Admission to the Glories of his heavenly Kingdom. The World cannot give, or so much as flatter us with any thing, comparable to such things as these. What Toys are its Riches! What Phantoms its Pleasures!

What

What Bubbles its Honours, in comparison with the Blessings of the Covenant of God! Soon must our Connection with the World be dissolved, and our Interest in its Enjoyments be lost for ever. Where now are the once enchanting Pleasures, the airy Honours, and the large Possessions, for which there's Reason to fear, that many who are gone into an eternal World, ruined their Souls? Vanished as an empty Dream, and with respect to them lost for ever. But a Relation to the blessed God cannot be dissolved; none of the Events of Life can change it; Poverty, Affliction, Reproach, Contempt, Doubts, Fears, and all the Artifices of Hell, cannot break the Covenant of God with his Servants. Death, that dissolves all other Relations, perfects this; and the Blessings of it shall endure, when the Body sleeps in the Dust, when it arises again from thence, when the World itself shall be dissolved, and through all the boundless Ages of Eternity.

And now, on such a View as this, chuse ye, whether you will join yourselves to the Lord, or to a vain and transient World, and your pernicious Lusts; whether you will have for your Portion the Favour of the God that made you, or present Trifles and everlasting Wo; a Kingdom of eternal Glory, or the Blackness of Darknes, Horrors of Despair, and devouring Fire for ever. By every Consideration that deserves your Re-

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gard, I beseech you in the Name of the Majesty of Heaven, to determine before the Lord this Day, to ask the Way to *Zion* with your Faces thitherward, and to join yourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten. And Oh may almighty Grace, which alone can effectually do it, render this Entreaty successful, and fix the Dermination of your Souls, beyond the Power of native Corruption, of an ensnaring World, and of the Subtilty of Satan ever to move it.

I conclude with a short Address, to those that are concerned to join themselves to the Lord, and to those who have through Grace already learnt to do it.

I. I address those who are concerned to join themselves to the Lord.

If any Heart melts, if any Desire kindles within, to be in Covenant with God, take heed that it *be not as the Morning Cloud, nor pass away like the early Dew**: Dread every thing that would divert your Attention from so important an Object. Remember Eternity is depending; the present relenting Hour is extremely critical, and if it is lost, you also are in the utmost Danger of being lost for ever. Go then to the Throne of Grace, and humbly entreat almighty Mercy, to fix you immoveably in this important Choice, and to receive you, unworthy as you are, into

* *Hof. vi. 4.*

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Covenant with God. Plead the gracious Promise in the Text, before the Lord, as that which you have the utmost Need to have fulfilled in you, and which there is some Appearance of being fulfilled in you. Entreat his gracious and constant Influence, that it may be so in the most ample manner, and diligently use all the Means which God has appointed for that Purpose, chearfully relying on the Riches of his Grace to every returning Penitent, and humble Suppliant at his Throne.

2. Let those also who have given up themselves to God, suffer the Word of Exhortation.

Take heed, my Brethren, of losing the Impression of your first Surrender of yourselves to him; review the solemn Transaction; call to Mind the sacred Pleasures of it, and the Blessings it has already afforded; adore the Grace that brought you to it; and frequently renew and confirm it, at the Footstool of the Throne of Grace, and in your Approaches to the holy Table of the Lord. Humble yourselves in Dust and Ashes, that you have no more faithfully and stedfastly observed the Engagements into which you have entered. Earnestly apply to Jesus, the Mediator of the Covenant betwixt God and you, for the Pardon of your Inconstancy in it, and for Grace to teach you to be more mindful of it. Let it be your daily Concern
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that it may never be forgotten, and that you may continually remember that you are not your own, nor at liberty to think, or speak, or act as you please; but *have opened your Mouth to the Lord, and cannot go back* *. And look forward with chearful Hope, and ardent Expectations, to that glorious Day, when you shall enter upon all the eternal Blessings, that are contained in the Covenant of God.

* Judg. xi. 35.

T H E E N D.



